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**ON THE  
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*ON THE*  
**BENGAL RENAISSANCE**

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Susobhan Sarkar

*papyrus*

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*in grateful remembrance of*  
*my* **STUDENTS and ASSOCIATES**



## **C O N T E N T S**

<b>Notes on the Bengal Renaissance</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Conflict within the Bengal Renaissance</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Religious Thought of Rammohun Roy</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Economic Thought of Rammohun Roy</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>David Hare</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Derozio &amp; Young Bengal</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Views on 1857</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>The National Council of Education</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Autobiography of an Unknown Indian</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Problems of Indian Historiography</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Supplementary Notes</b>	<b>165</b>





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**ON THE  
BENGAL  
RENAISSANCE**



# *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance*

## I INTRODUCTION

### *Nature of the Bengal Renaissance*

The impact of British rule, bourgeois economy and modern western culture was felt first in Bengal and produced an awakening known usually as the Bengal Renaissance. For about a century, Bengal's conscious awareness of the changing modern world was more developed than and ahead of that of the rest of India. The role played by Bengal in the modern awakening of India is thus comparable to the position occupied by Italy in the story of the European Renaissance.

In the broad family of peoples which constitute India, the recognition of the distinctiveness of the Bengalis has been in modern times largely bound up with the appreciation of this flowering of social, religious, literary and political activities in Bengal. And today when disintegration threatens every aspect of our life, it is more necessary than ever to recall our past heritage, to go over again the struggles and achievements which had built up a proud tradition, now in danger of being forgotten.

### *Five Periods*

What is being presented here is merely the sketch of a narrative of events on the surface, culled from well-known books on the subject. But even a survey based on secondary sources and confined to mere external facts has its own usefulness in serving as an introduction. For

This booklet, which does not pretend to be a Marxist analysis, was written as a factual sketch to supply background material to political workers on the left. Since its original publication in 1946, more than a quarter century of historical research has thrown much new light on the subject. It is however being reproduced here in its first form for historical reasons. Some mistakes therefore must have remained in the text, which have not been corrected in the light of later knowledge.

the convenience of such a preliminary study, the period under review is here divided into five sections, with dates chosen more or less arbitrarily, to demarcate them from each other:

1. 1815–33: The easiest starting point is, of course, the date 1815, when Rammohun Roy settled down in Calcutta and took up seriously his life's work. His death in England in 1833 obviously ends the period of which he was, indisputably, the central figure.
2. 1833–57: From the death of Rammohun to the out-break of the Indian Mutiny.
3. 1857–85: From the mutiny to the foundation of the Indian National Congress.
4. 1885–1905: From the commencement of the Congress to the partition of Bengal.
5. 1905–19: From the partition and the great swadeshi agitation to the coming of non-cooperation and the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

## II     1815–33 RAMMOHUN ROY 1772–1833

The central characteristics in the life and thought of Rammohun Roy were his keen consciousness of the stagnant, degraded and corrupt state into which our society had fallen, his deep love of the people which sought their all-round regeneration, his critical appreciation of the value of modern Western culture and the ancient wisdom of the East alike, and his untiring many-sided efforts in fighting for improving the conditions around him.

No contemporary ever approached him in the quantity and the quality of achievement or the range of activity. His writings themselves are the best proof of the life-giving spirit of new thought. Recent detractors of his deserved reputation have merely revealed their own failure to grasp the significance of the renaissance in our country.

### *A Synthesis*

In his outlook, Rammohun worked out a synthesis of the best thought of the East and the West. As a young man at Benares, he had studied the traditional Sanskrit culture. At Patna, he had delved deep in Persian and Arabic lore. During his travels in distant regions, "in plains as

well as in hilly lands", he had acquainted himself with various provincial cultures and even Tibetan Buddhism and Jainism.

Later in life, he mastered English thought and Western culture. He was quite at home with Christian religious literature and earned the esteem of British and American unitarians. Western radicals like Bentham and Roscoe greeted him as an equal ally. French savants honoured him. And all the time, Rammohun was no thinker shut up in his own speculations, but a champion of his people, engaged in the daily toil of advancing their conditions with an unfaltering vision of their bright modern destiny.

### *Vindication of Hindu Theism*

Even as a boy, Rammohun annoyed his parents by his free criticism of irrational orthodoxy. As he grew up, he lived apart from the family because of his altered habits of life and change of opinion. In his thirties he wrote in Persian his *Gift to Monotheists* in which he argued that the natural tendency in all religions was towards monotheism, but unfortunately people have always emphasised their special, peculiar creeds, forms of worship and practices which tend to separate one religion from another.

Having settled in Calcutta, Rammohun drew round him, in the Atmiya Sabha in 1815, an inner circle of aristocratic and new middle class liberals and held regular discussion meetings in the manner he had already introduced in his circle at Rangpur, where he was an official for some time.

He took the field with supreme courage against the current perversions of the ancient Hindu religion, which his learned and thoughtful contemporaries tolerated in their contempt and pity for the ignorant multitude. Between 1815 and 1817, he published the Bengali translation of the authoritative Vedanta together with an abridgement and also translated five of the principal Upanishads, to demonstrate to the general public that the Hindu scriptures themselves preached monotheism. He was plunged, in consequence, in great controversy with the orthodox pandits like Sankar Sastri, Mrityunjaya Vidyalankar and Subrahmanya Sastri, between 1817 and 1820, and published a series of polemical tracts in which he very ably defended his ground.

Rammohun pronounced a scathing criticism of priestcraft which inculcated a vulgar religion of superstitious idol-worship for the masses and discouraged translations of the scriptures into the vernacular, in a manner which reminds us of the leaders of the Protestant revolution.



He pointed out that unthinking idolatry had brought about a degradation in the character of the common people so that he felt it his duty to "rescue them from imposition and servitude, and promote their comfort and happiness".

He referred to commonsense and the practice of other peoples when he advocated the rationality and the perfect feasibility of theism and exposed the logical absurdities of idol-worship which "destroys the texture of society" and hinders moral reformation. Any particular scripture was liable to error and there was an inherent human right to depart from tradition, especially if tradition was "leading directly to immorality and destruction of social comforts". Such was the memorable message of the pioneer of the renaissance in our land.

#### *Liberal Reinterpretation of Christianity*

The new liberalism of Rammohun was not confined to a reassertion of Hindu theism, it spread also to his examination of the Christian religion and tradition which had begun to penetrate into our country.

In 1820, he published his *Precepts of Jesus* in which he carefully separated the moral message of Christ from the specific Christian doctrines and the reliance on the miracle stories. The moral teaching of Christianity, he said, had a far greater appeal than its metaphysical theology. The missionaries were at once up in arms against the daring heathen. Between 1820 and 1823, Rammohun wrote three *Appeals to the Christian Public* in defence of his position. He protested against the missionary practice of stressing dogmas and mysteries foreign to the people, their habit of dwelling more on the nature of Christ than on his gospel of love which was the main strength of their religion. He singled out for attack what he described as trinitarian polytheism and thus converted into unitarianism Adam, one of the Serampore missionaries himself.

In his *Brahmanical Magazine*, 1821-23, he displayed his deep love for the best traditions of India, and on behalf of his country protested against "encroachment upon the rights of her poor, timid and humble inhabitants" by proselytising Christian missionaries who instead of relying on reasonable arguments fell back on ridiculing the native religions and on holding out worldly inducements to converts.

Tenaciously defending the intellectual consistency of Hindu theism, he proceeded to expose what he considered to be the fallacies of missionary doctrines in a manner which won him the respect of British

and American unitarians as we see in their correspondence with him, and in the tributes they paid him.

Rammohun was no enemy of Christianity in its best sense which he believed to be a good influence on his countrymen. He had assisted some of the Serampore missionaries in the Bengali translations of the Gospel; he set up the Unitarian Committee in 1821 and helped it to maintain Adam as a missionary and run its own congregational service, school and printing press; in 1830, he even gave material support to the young Scottish missionary Duff in his crusade against 'godless' education. But his rational modern mind refused to put up with the metaphysical subtleties of missionary preachings and the unfairness in their propaganda. His deep learning and intellect made him one of the pioneers in the modern humanistic trend within even a foreign religious movement, Christianity.

#### *Foundation of the Brahmo Movement*

Nor was the stand of Rammohun merely critical or negative. He was moving towards a universal religion to be based on the best traditions of Hindu theism. In his *Humble Suggestions* (1823), he declared that all believers in one god were his brethren in religion, and he advocated wide toleration in his tract on *Different Modes of Worship*, published in 1825.

Not satisfied with the discussions of the Atmiya Sabha or the occasional unitarian services, he and his disciples organised a new theistic society, the Brahma Sabha, on 20 August 1828. A regular church was established in January 1830, as the culmination of Rammohun's religious thought, in the Trust Deed for which were defined the first principles of the famous Brahmo movement which worked like a leaven in the life of Bengal for a long time.

#### *Fight against "Sati"*

But Rammohun was no mere philosopher, critic or religious reformer. He was a stern fighter against social evils and a champion of those suffering from social oppression. This is illustrated by his historic campaign against the inhuman custom of sati — burning of Hindu widows. The British rulers were partly apathetic and partly nervous about the outcry which would follow the forcible suppression of the rite. Their regulations against the "misuse" of the practice were ineffective and even a tacit approval of the monstrous custom.

A total of about 8,000 burnings were officially recorded between

1815 and 1828. In three tracts, between 1818 and 1829, Rammohun came out in fiery denunciation of this murderous practice. He quoted the authority of the best religious books against the custom of sati, but coupled this with an appeal to reason and good sense of the community. He combined a spirited defence of the maligned Hindu womanhood with a tremendous attack on the lack of compassion on the part of the menfolk.

When Bentinck at last suppressed the rite on 4 December 1829, in the teeth of orthodox protests, it was Rammohun who strengthened the hands of the government by organising a deputation and an address signed by 300 Hindus and by publishing an *Abstract of Arguments* in 1830, also a petition to Parliament was arranged by him to prevent any repeal of Bentinck's order.

### *The New Education*

Rammohun was also a pioneer in educational reform. He was connected with the talks in 1816 which led to the foundation of the celebrated Hindu College, on 20 January 1817. But the orthodox rich Hindu objected to Rammohun's inclusion in the committee on account of his "heretical" views and close association with Muslims. Rammohun stood down at once in order not to hamper the first substantial effort made in the country to provide for western education to young men eager for the new light.

In his own way, he also helped the cause by running an Anglo-Hindu school, the course of instruction at which included, we are told, mechanics and astronomy, Voltaire and Euclid. He established a Vedanta College in 1825, where he tried to combine the teaching of oriental learning with western arts and sciences. He appealed in 1823 to the Church of Scotland Assembly to send out competent teachers, and when Duff came out to inaugurate the Scottish educational mission in Bengal in 1830, he received the influential backing of Rammohun.

Above all, his well-known letter to Lord Amherst on 11 December 1823, advocating an educational policy, was largely accepted as the official programme by Bentinck and Macaulay, though only as late as 1835. This was a plea for the teaching of useful western sciences, in the place of the classical lore of grammatical niceties and metaphysical speculations, in the true pre-Baconian fashion, speculations which had been forcing the students to consume a dozen years in wrestling with imaginary learning in dead languages.

This was harsh criticism for the prevalent system of classical educa-

tion in the state colleges, which confined themselves to Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian, dear to the heart of the orientalist among whom were included the new European scholars of Indian classics. But Rammohun was trailing the path for the new education from the West which was to shape the modern epoch of our history, and gave us a new orientation in life.

### *Bengali Language and Literature*

Rammohun was also one of the makers of Bengali prose. The work had already started with the efforts of the missionary Carey who, in 1801, had been placed in charge of the Bengali department at the government Fort William College which instructed the officials of the East India Company. Carey gathered round him a group of pandits in his efforts to lift Bengali from an unsettled dialect to the status of a regular language in the domain of prose expression.

Carey was responsible for a *Book of Dialogues* (1801), for a *Bengali Grammar* (1801), and for a *Dictionary* between 1815 and 1825. He had also set up Bengali types for printing and started the first Bengali newspaper, the weekly *Samachar Darpan* in 1818. One of his pandits, Mrityunjaya Vidyalankar, experimented with prose styles during 1802-17.

Yet in this field too, Rammohun came forward as a major force. From 1815, his translations, introductions and tracts, with their clarity and vigour of expression, gave a new dignity to Bengali prose and established its claim as a vehicle of elegant expression in serious subjects. Rammohun's polemics in Bengali were permeated with his care for the enlightenment of the general public and his newspaper articles had the same educative value. He used western punctuation and his *Bengali Grammar*, published in 1826, has been praised even by modern experts.

### *National Consciousness and the Fight for Reform*

Inspired with new ideals of life, Rammohun was breaking away from the tradition of passivity so congenial to feudal times. He held that his movement of reviving public interest in the Vedanta was prompted by his desire to promote the comfort of the people and to unite the different groups into which society had split up. He considered the forms of direct worship as a liberation from priestly tyranny and a means of realisation of human brotherhood. He protested against the evil effects of idolatry on the structure of society and against the

inconveniences of the caste system, "which has been the source of want of unity among us".

He felt that his position as a reformer from within made it necessary for him to avoid being legally branded as an "outcaste". Yet he translated the *Bajra Suchi* in 1827, a text highly critical of the caste system, and in a letter of 1828 he held that caste had deprived people of patriotic feeling and that religious reform was necessary "for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort", because the present system of religion "is not well calculated to promote their political interest".

Again and again, there flitted across his vision the prospect of a free India, after a period of British tutelage, and he expressed this view in an interview with the Frenchman, Jacquemont, in a discussion with Sandford Merton, in a letter on 18 August 1828 to Crawford. He felt that English rule was creating a middle class in India which would lead a popular movement of emancipation.

Rammohun figured in the first constitutional agitations in our country. We find him drawing up a memorial to the Supreme Court and a petition to the King-in-Council against the Press Ordinance of 1823, in which he defended liberty of free expression of opinion in such noble language that it recalls to mind Milton's *Areopagitica*. He protested against the discrimination involved in the Jury Act of 1827 and against government attempts to tax rent-free lands in 1830. He was connected with the agitation on the eve of the revision of the East India Company's charter due for 1833 and demanded the abolition of the company's trading rights and the removal of heavy export duties. On behalf of the Delhi emperor during his dispute with the company, he appealed to British national faith and sense of justice and also to world opinion at large.

Rammohun conducted a Bengali and a Persian weekly to shape public opinion, the *Sambad Kaumudi* from the end of 1821, and the *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* from the beginning of 1822. He suspended the publication of the latter in protest against the Press Ordinance of 1823. In his papers he strove consistently to educate the people on all the topics of the day.

He was a fearless champion of a cause if he considered it to be just. In a tract on the *Ancient Rights of the Females* (1822), he denounced the contemporary legal dependence of widowed mothers and unmarried or widow daughters on their menfolk and demanded property rights for women. He also attacked the practice of polygamy.

As a champion of common law when it was equitable, we find him defending free alienability of property in another tract on *Rights of Hindus over Ancestral Property* in 1830.

He also broke through the orthodox prohibition of sea-voyages by undertaking a daring trip abroad. In England, in 1831, he submitted to Parliament communications on the revenue and the judicial systems, the condition of the ryots and Indian affairs in general. We find him protesting against the miserable condition of the peasants and the misrule of the landlords, and demanding a fixed rent roll, a permanent settlement for the actual cultivators and a peasant militia. He put forward a programme of administrative reforms which were to become famous in Indian constitutional agitation, and included items like Indianisation of the services, separation of the executive from the judiciary, and trial by jury.

#### *International Sympathies and Contacts*

One of the most remarkable things about Rammohun was his keen interest in international affairs and his understanding of and affinity with progressive movements everywhere. As a young man in Rangpur, we find him keenly interested in European politics. According to his friend and official superior, Digby, Rammohun started with an adulation of Napoleon but changed his views when he felt that the emperor was suppressing liberty.

In the twenties of the last century we find his newspapers regularly discussing current problems like the Chinese question, the struggle in Greece, and the miseries of Ireland under the regime of absentee landlordism and the tithe. His sorrow at the failure of the revolution in Naples, in 1821, led him to cancel his engagements when he received the sad news, his delight at the revolution in Spanish America in 1823 took the form of a public dinner in honour of the event.

His international links are shown vividly in the fact that a book in Spanish with the new constitution in it was dedicated to him. "He could think and talk of nothing else" when he heard of the July revolution in France in 1830. On his way to England, at Cape Town, he insisted on visiting French frigates flying the revolutionary tri-colour flag though he had been temporarily lamed by an accident. He contributed to the university funds in the short time he was ashore in South Africa.

His mind was filled with elation when an outward bound ship passing his vessel gave the news of the favourable progress of the Reform

Bill in the English Parliament. He greeted the Manchester workers with the cry "Reform for ever". He considered the reform struggle in England as "a struggle between right and wrong" and contemplated severing his English connections if the great bill was thrown out.

We find him also an advocate of free intercourse between nations and in the domain of international relations he advanced the idea of a Franco-British congress to settle disputes. Not for Rammohun was the narrow insularity which has often cast a shadow on Indian national consciousness. His understanding was too clear, his love of liberty too deep for any such vagary.

#### THE ASSOCIATES OF RAMMOHUN ROY

We have dwelt at such length on Rammohun Roy because of his pioneer position in relation to the Bengal Renaissance, his comprehensive outlook, and the occasional tendency to belittle him in modern times. But even Rammohun was largely the product of his times. We are reminded very forcibly of this by the fact that he found from the beginning close associates and comrades to rally round him. The circle at Rangpur, the Atmiya Sabha from 1815, the Brahma Sabha of 1828, and the agitations for social or constitutional reform did not fail to attract a certain number of enthusiasts from the upper and middle classes, which shows that the times were ripe for change.

#### *David Hare (1775-1842)*

One non-Indian figure prominently as a comrade of Rammohun in the field of the new education where he has left an imperishable memory. This was David Hare who came out in 1800 as a watchmaker but made it his life's mission to spread modern education in the country where he lived on till his death, four decades later. With the stabilisation of British rule in Bengal, a demand for education on western lines was growing up in the country. A few private schools like those of Sherburne or Drummond in Calcutta tried pitifully to cope with the demand. The state maintained only a Sanskrit College or a Muslim Madrasa teaching their traditional classical lore, and even the education grant in the Charter Act of 1813 was being diverted by the orientalist advisers of the government towards the channel of indigenous classical education.

David Hare thought of organising a lead on new lines from the Calcutta gentry. He got in touch with Rammohun and moved the Chief

Justice, Sir Hyde East, to initiate discussions in 1816 which led to the foundation in 1817 of the celebrated Hindu College, which under the present name of Presidency College continues to this day. David Hare took the keenest interest in the working of this pioneer institution for years to come and was a daily visitor and adviser. He also organised the School Book Society in 1817 to prepare and publish much-needed text-books and the School Society in 1818 to establish schools of a new type and grant scholarships to deserving poor boys. We hear stories of how flocks of young hopefuls used to besiege Hare's door and run after his palanquin to win stipends from him.

After retiring from the watch trade, Hare devoted his entire time to his life's mission and would go on a daily round to the network of schools he had set up in the city. He would play with the boys, feed them, tend them in sickness. An entire generation of educated Bengali young men in the metropolis came to love and adore its great-hearted foreign friend and mourned his tragic death when he died of cholera in 1842.

#### *Women's Education*

The School Society took keen interest in women's education in the country and agitated for it. This attracted the attention of the British and Foreign School Society which sent out Miss Cooke in 1821, who organised ten girls' schools with the support of the Church Missionary Society. Later on, a Bengal Ladies' Society sponsored by philanthropic Englishwomen started more schools and won some rich donations from Indian sympathisers. In Adam's *Report* of 1834, we find functioning 19 girls' schools founded in places other than Calcutta, though most of them were under missionary inspiration.

#### *Dwarkanath Tagore (1794-1846) & Others*

Of the Indian associates of Rammohun Roy, the foremost in social eminence was Dwarkanath Tagore who was afterwards called "the Prince" and was an ancestor of Rabindranath Tagore. He was educated in Sherburne's School and got his instruction in law from a barrister, Ferguson. He amassed wealth as dewan to the salt agent and then as proprietor of Carr, Tagore and Company; he represented the new aristocracy linked with business.

Dwarkanath was a close ally of Rammohun, whose associates also included other aristocrats like Prasanna Kumar Tagore who founded the *Reformer* in 1831 and became an eminent lawyer, and middle-



class men like Chandrasckhar Deb and Tarachand Chakravarti, the first secretary of the Brahma Sabha. The city seethed with excitement as Rammohun cast his spell over a large circle of friends and followers.

#### CONSERVATIVE CRITICS OF RAMMOHUN

Rammohun, however, could not carry the whole or even the greater bulk of Calcutta society with him in his daring crusade. His heterodoxy aroused vehement protest and a sharp reaction set in against him. In his own village home, Rammohun was ostracised by neighbours and relatives turned against him so that he found city life in Calcutta more congenial and spent most of his time in the metropolis. Ribald songs passed current in the city itself against him and were sung, we are told, by even the street urchins. He was sometimes even subjected to insults in the public streets. We have already seen how the orthodox gentlemen forced him out of the Hindu College committee. The vexatious law suits which dogged Rammohun and took up much of his time have often been attributed to the general feeling against him. He was thus forced by public opinion to be more cautious in his general bearing than would have been the case otherwise.

#### *Radhakanta Deb (1783–1867)*

The orthodox pandits in their controversy with the “heretic” found their great patron in Radhakanta Deb, the scion of the House of Sobhabazar and the recognised chief of orthodox society. A famous classical scholar himself, Radhakanta began in 1819 the compilation of a Sanskrit encyclopaedia which was a monument to his learning. He was associated with the reactionary petition (in 1829) against the suppression of the sati rite. In 1830, he was the leader of the orthodox religious society, the Dharma Sabha, which was founded as a counterblast to the Brahmo movement. The conservative rich rallied round him and at the meetings of the Dharma Sabha the street would be jammed by the private carriages of such people.

Yet, Radhakanta was no out and out reactionary. He was a great benefactor of the fountain of western learning, the Hindu College. He was a member of the School Book Society and one of the secretaries of the School Society. He himself wrote a book advocating women’s education and was a steady supporter of the movement.

*Other Critics of Rammohun*

Even in Rangpur, Rammohun's circle aroused the hostility of orthodox critics who were headed by Gaurikanta Bhattacharya, the author of a tract, *Jnananjan*, against the reformers. In Calcutta, the gifted Bhabani Charan Banerji left Rammohun's Bengali paper and conducted in opposition to him a rival journal — the *Sambad Chandrika*. Bhabani Charan was a master of satire and between 1825 and 1831 castigated the men and women who were inclining to new ways of life and abandoning the traditional simple habits.

Ramkamal Sen, the grandfather of the famous Keshab Chandra, was another orthodox leader, though like Radhakanta Deb, he was connected with new institutions like the Hindu College. The conservative opposition to Rammohun was not blindly reactionary. Thus, Mrityunjaya Vidyalkar who polemised against Rammohun disapproved of the practice of sati as early as 1817. Yet, as a whole, the conservative critics missed, as their modern apologists do even today, the epoch-making significance of the lifework of Rammohun.

## THE RISE OF NEW RADICALISM

In Rammohun's own lifetime, however, we have the genesis of a trend of ultra-radicalism, destined to be famous under the name of the Young Bengal movement, which sprang from the precincts of the Hindu College and created consternation for a period, and with which Rammohun himself was out of sympathy. Arising out of the tradition of the French revolution and English radicalism, this movement had a distinct element of free thought in it which offended Rammohun's sense of decency and theistic idealism. The young men in their turn returned the compliment and their organ the *Enquirer* contemptuously dubbed his movement as "coming as far as half the way in religion and politics". The inspiration of Young Bengal came from one of the strangest figures in the history of Bengal Renaissance — an Anglo-Indian, Derozio.

*Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809–31)*

Derozio was something of a prodigy. He was educated at one of the private schools of the day, in the Dharamtola section of the city, run by a Scotsman, Drummond, who had something of the reputation of a poet, scholar and a notorious free thinker. From him apparently

the young Derozio got steeped in the intoxicating freedom urge of the French revolution, and a passion for freedom of thought and liberation from the deadweight of all tradition possessed his soul.

Even while in his teens, Derozio could criticise Kantian philosophy with competence and blossomed out as a minor poet, his poem the *Fakir of Jhungeera* striking a fervid patriotic note — unique in one from his community. Appointed a teacher of the Hindu College in May 1826, he at once drew to himself like a magnet a host of boys in the upper classes who began to adore him and drink deep in the fountain of free thought.

Derozio encouraged them to debate freely and question all authority. They had a free run of his house and as a mark of emancipation exulted in forbidden food and drink. Derozio started an Academic Association with a monthly organ, the *Athenium*, in which, a pupil, Madhav Chandra Mallik, defiantly proclaimed that he and his friends hated Hinduism from the bottom of their hearts.

Round Derozio rallied the best boys of the college who ridiculed old traditions, defied the social and religious rites, demanded education for women, and to flaunt their independence indulged in wine-drinking and beef-eating. The college authorities in great alarm removed — at the instance of Ramkamal Sen — the dangerous corrupter of youth on 25 April 1831. Derozio died of cholera before the year was out, but his memory remained green in the hearts of his beloved disciples.

### *Young Bengal*

Derozio's pupils came to be known collectively as Young Bengal. As early as 1831, we find them coming out with an English and a Bengali organ — the *Enquirer* and the *Jnananveshan*. Some of the Derozians startled the whole of Calcutta society by embracing Christianity. Two of them, Mahesh Chandra Ghosh and Krishnamohan Banerji, announced their conversion in 1832.

## III 1833–57 THE DEROZIANs

Contemporary society was shocked beyond measure by the doings of the Derozians, and yet they formed more of a group with a certain

outlook than a real sustained movement with a solid basis and growing support.

The Derozians were a band of bright young men who had come under the spell of a striking personality and they created a sensation and a stir. But their stand lacked much positive content and they failed to develop a definite progressing ideology. The concept of the people and their rights which had flowered in the great western bourgeois democratic revolution that had awakened them did not take much concrete shape in their mind.

They were brilliant individuals faithful to the last to the memory of their master and close-knit to each other by the bonds of affection and friendship. Yet they did not prove to be a growing school of thought attracting new adherents from wider circles. They made some mark in their day but, nonetheless, they faded out like "a generation without fathers and children".

#### *Early Activities of the Derozians*

For several years, however, the Derozians attracted much attention. They conducted their two organs — the *Enquirer* and the *Jnananveshan* ("Search after Wisdom"). In 1934–35, one of them, Rasik Krishna Mallik, delivered in public meetings impressive speeches on the death of Rammohun Roy, the revision of the company's charter, and the freedom of the press. They kept up Derozio's Academic Association up to about 1839 and supplemented it by an Epistolary Association for the exchange of views within their circle.

Radical activities in England seem to have exercised an influence over them for we find them setting up a Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge in 1838, to be followed by a Mechanics Institute in 1839. The contempt for tradition in their Hindu College days continued to influence their successors. On the one hand, Christianity claimed further converts in the persons of Madhusudan Datta (another promising student of the college who left his ancestral faith in 1843) and Jnanendra Mohan Tagore (the only son of Prasanna Kumar Tagore); on the other hand drinking — which the Derozians had introduced as a symbol of emancipation — began to spread in an alarming manner amongst people who were untouched by the nobler marks of Derozian free thought.

The genuine brand of the Young Bengal mind was, however, being agitated by issues like the treatment of Indian labour in distant Mauritius, the extension of the right of trial by jury, the introduc-

tion of English as court language, freedom of the press and forced labour amongst the coolies employed by government departments. Derozians were being drawn towards more active politics, though quite a number of them had moved into government jobs as posts were being opened to Indians under the new Charter Act of 1833.

### *Politics of Young Bengal*

In 1842, the Derozians started a new organ, the *Bengal Spectator*, which turned more towards economics and politics than towards the pure pursuit of culture. The Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge tended to become a platform for political discussion as well, in addition to its study of social and general cultural subjects on a variety of which papers were read by the Derozians. In a society meeting in the rooms of the Hindu College on 8 February 1843, Principal D. L. Richardson protested against "seditious remarks" by a speaker, but the chairman of the meeting ruled him out. The chairman on the occasion happened to be Tarachand Chakravarti, a slightly older contemporary of Derozio's direct pupils, who was earlier an associate of Rammohun but was now identifying himself with Young Bengal. He edited the *Quill* and the Derozians came to be called after him the Chakravarti faction.

Early in 1843, George Thompson of the anti-slavery agitation reputation addressed several public meetings which were organised by the Derozians who were roused to enthusiasm by his gifts as an orator. Out of this excitement arose a political association inspired by Thompson and conducted by Young Bengal. This was the Bengal British India Society founded on 20 April 1843, with the object of concerted activity for the protection of the legitimate rights of the subjects, and was open to all.

Neither the *Bengal Spectator*, nor the new society lasted long but they left a taste for politics. One of the Derozians, Ramgopal Ghose, known as an excellent speaker from his student days, became now a regular orator and in 1847 was hailed in the press as the Indian Demosthenes. In 1849-50, the European community was up in arms against the so-called black bills which aimed at subjecting the European residents also to the jurisdiction of the local courts in place of the old privilege of trial by the Calcutta Supreme Court alone, Ramgopal became even more famous by his spirited defence of the proposed legislation in a tract called *Remarks on the Black Acts*.

In 1851, the Derozians linked up with the other groups in the

foundation of the British Indian Association. The cultural interests of Young Bengal did not disappear in the years of political excitement. Two of them, Peary Chand Mitra and Radhanath Sikdar, founded a little later, about 1857, the *Monthly Magazine* in Bengali which had the distinction of carrying on a crusade for a simple style in Bengali writing, intelligible even to the average women in society. This was a protest against the prevalent passion for a chaste style in prose which tended to be heavily Sanskritised.

### *Protagonists of Young Bengal*

The prominent personalities of the Young Bengal group were about ten in number. The seniormost was Tarachand Chakravarti (1804–55) who was a pre-Derozian student of the Hindu College and a former member of the Rammohun circle and the first secretary of the Brahma Sabha. He made some name as an editor, a lexicographer and a minor officer of the government. In 1834, he was considered to be the chief of the Young Bengal faction.

The most imposing was Krishnamohan Banerji (1813–85), who was expelled from home in 1831 on account of some escapades on the part of his young friends, accepted Christianity next year and taunted Hindu reaction in his organ, the *Enquirer*. He became a Christian missionary in 1837 but kept up his radicalism. Krishnamohan was very learned and the author of an encyclopaedia. In later life, he was universally respected and was often the first choice as president for a society or at a meeting.

Ramgopal Ghose (1815–68) became the most famous of the Derozians. He made a great name as a successful businessman but kept himself in the closest touch with his college friends and thus formed the centre of the whole group. He was connected with all the cultural and political activities of Young Bengal and became famous all over the country by his eloquent orations and his protest against European pretensions in the black acts controversy.

Rasik Krishna Mallik (1810–58) was noted for great erudition and thoughtful speech. He had once refused to swear in a law court by the holy Ganges water in the usual manner and he ran away from home to escape from orthodoxy. Later on, as an honest official, he built up a great reputation for personal integrity.

Peary Chand Mitra (1814–83) managed in his student days a free school for other students. He was connected with the Calcutta Public Library from its initiation in 1835, as a deputy librarian, librarian,

secretary and curator successively and he made the library an intellectual centre of his own group. He was a frequent contributor to all periodicals, an active member in a host of committees and a man of varied interests. His gifts were reflected in his editing of the *Agricultural Miscellany* in 1853.

A close friend of Peary Chand Mitra was Radhanath Sikdar (1813–70), diarist and mathematician, computator and surveyor in the government department, whose courageous stand for the rights of the poor coolies under the department freed them from the servitude of unpaid forced labour at the whim of the sahib. Radhanath bluntly refused marriage with the child-wife proposed for him in the usual manner. The two friends — Peary Chand and Radhanath — conducted, towards the end of this period, a campaign for a simple colloquial style in Bengali prose.

The Derozians also included the saintly Ramtanu Lahiri (1813–98), beloved and respected by all, even by the common people, though he publicly renounced his sacred Brahmanical thread in 1851, kept pace with progressive thought throughout his long life, and as a mere school master struggled against poverty most of his days.

At the other pole in the group stood Dakshinaranjan Mukherji (1812–87), the bright rich young man of the group, donor of the site for the Bethune College for Women in Calcutta when it was a novel venture for higher education for girls. Dakshinaranjan was intimate with the Derozian family, forward in defying every convention, and prominent in all Young Bengal activities. But he was forced out of Calcutta society by a social scandal and settled down in Oudh.

Sibchandra Deb (1811–90) is remembered as a great benefactor of his native town of Konnagar, as an upright official, and as a prominent Brahmo leader in the next period. Harachandra Ghose (1808–68) was another Derozian official with a reputation for integrity. Lastly, we find mention of an unnamed Derozian who had turned a sanyasi, went to West India and played a part in a struggle of the people against mis-government in Kathiawar by the local princes.

### *Nature of the Young Bengal Phase*

The flutter caused in Bengal society by the Derozians was, however, in the perspective of history something ephemeral and unsubstantial. They failed to develop any movement outside their own charmed circle and the circle itself could hardly keep any significant form. Worldly occupations and private interests inevitably claimed the attention of the

individual members of the group, the majority of whom came from middle-class homes and had a living to earn. Radical politics of a western type were hardly possible in Bengal a century ago and the rich promise we see in the Derozians never matured into anything solid.

Their only trait which was widely copied in contemporary society was the escape from social conventions, but even here there was no sturdy revolt or bold defiance but mere evasion. This led to sad corruption in which there was amongst the imitators no trace of the personal integrity and courage of the real Derozians which have such a charm even today.

#### MODERATE REFORMERS

The moderate reformers, who derived their inspiration from Rammohun and had a contempt for the vagaries of Young Bengal, tried meanwhile steadily to maintain their ground. Rather eclipsed in the first decade of this period, they became more important after 1843 and finally re-asserted their hold. They found a leader in Debendranath Tagore in 1843, and in the fifties the dominating figure of Vidyasagar was their great ally.

1833-43

The Rammohun tradition was at first maintained rather feebly by his former associates of whom the most eminent was Dwarkanath, the head of the House of Tagore. Another Tagore, Prasanna Kumar, conducted the *Reformer*, the moderate counterpart of the radical *Enquirer* in the early thirties. The church founded by Rammohun struggled on amidst difficulties, the chief credit for its preservation going to its minister, Pandit Ramchandra Vidyabagish, who is also known as the author of *Nitidarshan* (1841), a book of essays on mild patriotism and civic virtues.

The general moderate outlook, if not the reformed religious views, was reflected by other literary men like Kashiprasad Ghose, an old Hindu College boy, who was not exactly a Derozian, who wrote English verses with patriotic sentiments and conducted from 1846 to 1857 a weekly called the *Hindu Intelligencer*. Another ally was Iswar Chandra Gupta (1812-59), a writer with a distinctive individuality who has a position of his own in the history of Bengali literature. He edited the *Sambad Prabhakar* which soon became the best-known Bengali journal



and was turned in 1839 into the first Bengali daily; that the *Prabhakar* became such a force in educated society of the day was due mainly to its gifted editor.

Iswar Chandra Gupta, with his native poetic talent and a genius for satire, exercised an important influence on the next generation of Bengali poets. He is also remembered for his efforts to collect and preserve Bengal's folk poetry for which the average educated person of the day had only contempt.

Like their radical contemporaries, the moderates also tried to set up societies. In 1836, they founded a Society for the Promotion of the Bengali Language and Literature which was not entirely limited to literary activities. In 1837-38, was organised the Landholders' Association which took up the old agitation against the taxation of the traditional rent-free lands. Its membership was open to all grades of landed proprietors.

Dwarkanath Tagore repeated Rammohun's exploit of going abroad in 1842 and again in 1844 and on the latter occasion took out with him the first batch of Bengali medical students bound for training in England. It was he who brought George Thompson to this country, though the orator was quickly captured by Young Bengal who organised his meetings.

### *Shift in Conservative Attitude*

The feud against Rammohun gradually died out after his death, in spite of bickerings between the Dharma Sabha and the Brahma Sabha. The followers of Rammohun had hardly kept up his fighting energy and many-sided new thought; they were little of a danger now. Times had also changed and the centre of the stage was held often enough by Young Bengal with its far greater irreverence. The conservative chiefs were therefore relenting in their attitude. Radhakanta Deb and Ramkamal Sen joined hands with Dwarkanath and Prasanna Kumar Tagore in the Landholders' Association. The old scholar, Pandit Jai-gopal Tarkalankar, revised and partly rewrote the old Bengali versions of the epics and published them between 1830 and 1836 from the Serampore Press.

### *Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905)*

The revitalisation of the moderate reform attitude which became apparent from 1843 was mainly the work of Debendranath Tagore, Dwarkanath's son. Educated mainly at Rammohun's own foundation,

the Anglo-Hindu School, Debendranath sharply differentiated himself from Young Bengal and he had also temperamental differences with that group. A deeply religious man, his mind developed a fine balance between tradition and new thought. He had Rammohun's tenacity and seriousness of purpose, though not his variety of interest and width of outlook.

Young Debendranath turned away rather abruptly from the life of luxury which surrounded him in his princely parental mansion. He drew around him kindred spirits who found their spiritual home in the Tatvabodhini Sabha founded by him in 1839. This society held a very significant position in the intellectual life of the mid-nineteenth century Bengal, with its serious ideals in life, dignity of expression and character building.

The sabha started a school in 1840, and in 1843 came out its celebrated organ — the *Tatvabodhini Patrika*. This periodical in its reputation lived up to its proud title which refers to the realisation and inculcation of serious thought. Here was the germ of a new thought movement, less spectacular but more solid than Young Bengal.

Debendranath now proceeded to breathe a new life into the moribund Brahmo Samaj. With about twenty faithful associates he himself was solemnly initiated into Rammohun's faith on the 7th of Poush (December 1843) — a date the anniversary of which is still religiously kept at Santiniketan in the institution founded by his world-famous son. Under Debendranath, who in later life came to be universally called the Great Sage, the revived Brahmo Samaj took up the cause of reformed religion introduced by Rammohun but with a sharp emphasis on our traditional culture in reaction against the extreme Anglicism of Young Bengal.

The latter aspect attracted much attention in 1845, when Debendranath came forward to organise an intense agitation against the missionary tactics in proselytising. This anti-conversion campaign of the Tatvabodhini group brought them nearer to the old conservatives like Radhakanta Deb. On the other hand, it roused the contempt of the Derozians. Krishnamohan Bannerji in a famous article pilloried the half-way house which was Brahmoism; Ramgopal Ghose called the reformers hypocrites; Ramtanu Lahiri proclaimed that "the followers of Vedanta temporise", and falter about the issue of revelation in the scriptures, so that he had a poor opinion of them; and as for conversion he claimed that there must be perfect equality and freedom of choice for everyone.

*Akshay Kumar Datta (1820–86)*

The most remarkable of the close associates of Debendranath was Akshay Kumar Datta who was called to the editorship of the *Tatva-bodhini Patrika*. His great educative essays arouse admiration even to-day in spite of their severe intellectual form. In the early fifties of the last century, he was discussing man's relationship with external nature and was writing lessons on modern knowledge for beginners. He was crippled in 1855 by excessive mental strain and yet we find him dictating, twenty years later, a classic account of the religious denominations in India!

Perhaps the most striking thing about him was his intellectual revolt against Brahmo orthodoxy. Tacitly at least, the Brahmo church still stood by the dogma of the infallibility of the Vedas and claimed the Vedanta as its sole theoretical basis.

This had aroused the acid comments of the Derozians. The intellectual honesty of Akshay Kumar Datta made him see the point and gradually he won over Debendranath himself. By 1850, the Brahmo Samaj as a genuine theistic movement abandoned the faith in ancient Hindu scriptures as the exclusive theoretical sheet-anchor.

*Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820–91)*

The steady, solid, moderate reform movement could look as an ally upon the towering personality of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, who earned for himself the respect of all Bengal and a great place in history. In the midst of grinding poverty, this young Brahmin boy was educated in the Sanskrit College from 1829 to 1841. From the head-panditship of Fort William College he rose, step by step, to the principalship of Sanskrit College in 1851. A regular classical scholar, he educated himself in English and came to represent a fine blend of the best in both cultures.

Vidyasagar had both the originality of a genius and the sterling strength of an heroic character. He thought out a new technique of teaching Sanskrit more easily to beginners and wrote a series of primers in the Sanskrit language and literature adapted to modern needs. He also arranged for the collection and preservation of old Sanskrit books. In Bengali prose, Vidyasagar's work was a landmark. He evolved an elegant, although a bit too stately and chaste, style of writing which impressed everybody.

Between 1847 and 1863, he wrote a series of books in Bengali

which became classics to the students of literature. In these, he drew his material impartially from Indian epics and popular tales as well as Western fables and biographies. His *Bengali Primer* for beginners is even today in household use.

But Vidyasagar was no mere scholar or man of letters. As an educational reformer, he opened the Sanskrit College to non-Brahmin boys and provided for classical scholars some English education as well. As an administrator of vision, he rendered splendid service in his capacity of government inspector and in four districts he organised a total of 35 girls' schools and 20 model schools. He was closely associated from its early days with the institution which now bears his name and which under his fostering care became the outstanding example of a non-official, secular and popular institution for higher education with a purely Indian teaching staff. He was equally interested in women's higher education, and was secretary to the Bethune School for some time.

Vidyasagar revived the splendid tradition of social reform blunted since Rammohun's death and raised once again issues which deeply moved society. He was intimate with the Tatvabodhini group though he did not become a Brahmo. Orthodox in his personal life, austere beyond the dreams of Young Bengal, it was left to this scholar and man of letters to take up the best traditions of Rammohun's social crusade for the oppressed.

He raised his powerful voice against child-marriage as early as 1850 and was campaigning against polygamy in 1871-73. But his most memorable stand was in 1855, when he caused a sensation by his outspoken advocacy of widow-marriage in the teeth of the deepest social prejudices. Like Rammohun, he made out his case by a parade of scriptural authority to silence his critics, but undoubtedly, as with Rammohun again, what moved him most was a deep sympathy for the unfortunate and the exploited and his reverence for humanity. The Young Bengal organ, the *Bengal Spectator*, had advocated widow-marriage in 1842, but it was Vidyasagar's agitation which made it a real issue. Legalisation was secured for the reform, though upper class society was hardly convinced of the need of such a reform.

Finally, Vidyasagar left a very deep impression on the public mind by his strength of character and high moral quality. Stories still circulate about how independent he was in his relations with government, how he threw away his post because of undue official interference, with what generosity he helped the needy and the unfortunate, and

how close he was to the common people, including the tribesmen of the locality where he had built a small country retreat to recoup his health.

#### ASSOCIATES OF VIDYASAGAR

Associated with Vidyasagar among others, we find his close friend, Pandit Madanmohan Tarkalankar (1817–58). He was, like Vidyasagar, connected with the Bethune project of women's education which took shape in 1849. He wrote a powerful advocacy of education for women in 1850 and one of the earliest primers for children in the same year.

In the same circle was Kaliprasanna Sinha (1840–70) who was almost a prodigy. As a boy he founded and managed creditably the Society for the Promotion of Learning in 1853. He put up a petition with 3,000 signatures in support of widow-marriage in 1856, and offered pecuniary assistance in such marriages to fight social ostracism. He started a theatre in connection with his society in 1856, but much of his career falls outside the period here under discussion.

#### BRITISH INDIAN ASSOCIATION

The "black acts" controversy, in which the Young Bengal leader, Ramgopal Ghose, figured, led to much political excitement and the consequence was the formation, in 1851, of the British Indian Association in which all groups joined in — radicals, moderates and even conservatives. The British India Society of the radicals and the Landholders' Association of the moderates being now both defunct, the new association forged a new comprehensive unity for the furtherance of Indian interests and defence of Indian rights. Unlike the two older bodies again, the new institution was exclusively Indian in membership. Debendranath Tagore as the secretary of the association sent out a circular letter to other metropolitan towns to take up the work of organised agitation.

In view of the approaching revision of the company's charter in 1853, the association decided to present a general petition formulating Indian demands. The Petition of 1852 was drafted by the young talented journalist Harish Chandra Mukherji, afterwards the editor of the *Hindoo Patriot* — founded in 1853 as the organ of the association, and a well-known lecturer in English on Brahmoism. The Petition

summed up the Indian grievances destined to be, later on, the staple of many an agitation, and demanded among other items the end of the company's monopoly in indigo and salt production, state aid for Indian industry, admission of Indians to higher posts, creation of an Indian legislature with Indian majority — in short, the first political aspirations of the waking bourgeoisie.

In the fifties, the British Indian Association was quite active and was complimented by the historian Routledge as the exact counterpart of similar English organisations. In 1856, it supported a missionary memorial for inquiry into the condition of the tenants. Next year, it held a protest meeting, just on the eve of the mutiny, against the renewed European outcry at a fresh attempt to bring them under the jurisdiction of the ordinary district courts. Bengal was fast developing the new technique of organised political agitation.

### *Changes in Official Policy*

The period, 1833–57, was marked by quite a number of big changes introduced at the instance of the government, but quite in response to the awakening public opinion. In 1835, we find almost a turning point. Macaulay and Bentinck ended the long controversy over educational policy by plumping for western education as Rammohun had advocated in 1823, to the delight of Young Bengal which held that the best learning was embodied in western culture. Metcalfe conceded full freedom of the press. The year also witnessed the creation of the first medical college and the Calcutta Public Library.

In 1849, the “black acts” attempted in vain equality before the law, but the Bethune School was a success. The Charter Act of 1853 gave concessions though they fell far short of the demands formulated by the British Indian Association. The Education Despatch, 1854, organised the basis of the education system for next half a century and the Department of Public Instruction was set up in 1856. By 1857, the mutiny year, universities were being founded in the three presidency towns.

#### IV 1857-85 AFTER THE MUTINY

The Indian mutiny was an upheaval of a mixed character. In regions like Oudh it had some popular basis, but almost everywhere the leadership was of a type which had no attraction for the new middle classes growing up under British rule. The rising of the so-called Bengal army found no echo in the mind of educated Bengal, though the latter was already voicing its criticism of British rule and aspirations for the future. The *Hindoo Patriot*, fast becoming a power, started a campaign of reassurance, strongly supporting the middle path of Lord Canning, disowning the mutiny on the one hand and resisting on the other the panicky European clamour for vengeance. Its lead was the lead for the new Bengal of the middle classes.

The British Indian Association was a good deal frightened and ultra-moderate counsels began to prevail with a coming to the fore of the landed interests. We find the association petitioning in 1859 for an extension of Permanent Settlement to Upper India as a bulwark against disturbances and sedition.

#### *Indigo*

Fortunately for Bengal, the mood of uneasy alarm soon passed away and criticism again held sway; there was even a step forward. This was due to the tremendous indigo agitation which swept like a tidal wave over the country in 1859-60 and formed a striking landmark in the growth of Bengal's consciousness. Indigo cultivation was a monopoly in the hands of European planters for a long time.

In the days of Rammohun, the cultivation of indigo still seemed to be a forward move away from traditional agriculture and holding out hopes of material advancement for the peasants. The oppressive aspect of the system was yet undeveloped and little known. By the middle of the century, however, the tyranny of the planters reached its peak. In practising forcible production of indigo in the mad search after bigger profits, the English planters and their native agents fell back upon coercion of the peasants. The cultivators were persuaded to take advances and were held down to their promises; to increase output terrible pressure was brought to bear upon the helpless cultivators; the planters resorted to physical force against recalcitrants. Illegal beatings, detention, outrages became the order of the day. Even govern-

ment officials felt that the planters were going too far, but remonstrances and regulations proved equally unavailing.

### *Popular Upsurge (1859–60)*

The tyranny of the planters provoked a real mass upsurge amongst the cultivators which even the Royal Institute of International Affairs has noted as “a landmark in the history of nationalism”. The government had announced that indigo cultivation was to be on a voluntary basis. To assert their right of not growing indigo under the compulsion of the planters, the peasants in 1859, in hundreds of thousands, spontaneously refused to produce indigo. In a river tour, Sir John Peter Grant was appealed to by thousands of men and women, all along his route, for protection against compulsory cultivation. Yet in the villages, the planters backed by the physical force of their own retainers went on putting pressure on the helpless peasants.

The struggle raged in the countryside and the ranks of the people threw up their own leaders. The Wahabi Raffique Mandal, in North Bengal, stood forth as the champion of the oppressed “fighting every battle to the bitter end”. In Central Bengal, the Biswas brothers, Bishnucharan and Digambar, resigned their posts under the planters and stood out as the leaders of the peasants, fighting law suits, at the same time organising resistance to the retainers of the planters on the spot.

### *Bourgeois Indignation*

Educated Bengal responded splendidly to the mass struggle of the peasants. The *Hindoo Patriot* took up their cause and the editor, Harish Chandra Mukherji, sent forth a stream of fiery articles and worked day and night in giving practical advice and aid to the cultivators and their representatives who thronged at his doors. Two young men — Manomohan Ghose and Sisir Kumar Ghose — both destined to future fame, threw themselves into the agitation.

Dinabandhu Mitra, then a government official, wrote anonymously in 1860 a drama, the *Neel Darpan*, which moved the reading public as few books ever do. This depiction of the horrors of planter rule was promptly translated into English by the rising poet, Madhusudan Datta. The planters struck against Rev. Long in whose name the translation was published. An English judge fined Long a thousand rupees, but the fine was paid off on the spot by the young Kaliprasanna Sinha.

Harish Chandra Mukherji was charged with defamation and even



after his untimely death, in 1861, the planters pursued his family in the courts to financial ruin. But all this turmoil had some effect. The Indigo Commission of 1860 could not avoid the public exposure of planter rule in the countryside. The worst oppression now began to fade out and gradually official restraint became more effective. A generation later, the production of synthetic dyes killed indigo cultivation itself.

#### CREATIVE LITERATURE AND LEARNING

The post-mutiny era in the history of Bengal was marked in the next place by a magnificent outburst of creative activity in literature. The flowering of the renaissance began with the poetry of Madhusudan Datta, the drama of Dinabandhu Mitra, and the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterji. The soul of educated Bengali had started to express itself in its own chosen medium. It turned also to modern scholarship and learning.

##### *Madhusudan Datta (1824-73)*

Madhusudan Datta was a brilliant student of the Hindu College in the late thirties and the early forties when the Derozian tradition had not yet died out. He was drawn irresistibly towards the Anglicist current and developed a way of life which was denationalised and outlandish. He reminds one of a typical Italian humanist indulging in wild free living. He fell also under the spell of D. L. Richardson who imparted to his college pupils an adulation of Shakespeare and romantic poetry.

Madhusudan began to write English verses and shocked Calcutta society by embracing Christianity in 1843, which he did more for private reasons than because of any religious conviction. After his college days and an eight years' sojourn at Madras, he came back to Calcutta in 1856. The educated Bengalis were then turning to their own language for self-expression, encouraged by the powerful writings of Akshay Kumar Datta and Vidyasagar. Madhusudan with the gift of genius now plunged into the new tide with his characteristic energy.

His first drama, the *Sarmistha*, staged in 1859, was a sensation, for it broke away from the classical conventions, and was followed by two others in the same style. In 1860 came two satirical plays which lashed out with equal vehemence against the vices of westernised young men and orthodox old rogues. In 1860, he introduced blank verse in

Bengali and next year came his masterpiece, the *Meghnadbadh*, in the same style.

Madhusudan revealed not merely the potential powers of the new poetry in Bengali which gave him the status of one of its makers and greatest exponents; he also treated the epic themes he took up in the most daring and unconventional way, revaluated old traditional values and glorified the spirit of revolt. Within three years he brought about something of a literary revolution. Later on, he followed this up in 1865–66 by introducing the sonnet in Bengali poetry. His life followed a tragic path but genius secured for him a permanent place in the history of Bengali literature.

*Dinabandhu Mitra (1828–73)*

Dinabandhu Mitra presented a totally different picture with his never-failing fund of humour, his respectable life spent in government service, and his more conventional outlook on life. But he too left his mark when he turned from minor poetry to major drama. In 1860, he soared to great heights in his *Neel Darpan* which as a drama of social protest and exposure at the peak of the indigo crisis is still unsurpassed in Bengali. He also excelled Madhusudan in the drama of social satire and carved out for himself an honoured place in literary history of Bengal through sheer talent.

*Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1838–94)*

One of his intimate friends was Bankim Chandra Chatterji who moulded Bengali prose into a fine literary form which achieved great renown. Indeed, Bankim was one of the giants of Bengali writing and exercised tremendous influence. In 1856 came out his first historical romance, *Durgeshnandini*, which was a revelation to the reading public and started the vogue for romantic novels. In *Bishabriksha* (1873) he made popular the social novel in Bengali.

He founded and edited the *Bangadarshan* for four years from 1872. This was the first great cultural periodical in Bengali and drew to it a group of writers to whom and to the reading public Bankim was now the acknowledged leader.

In his *Kamalakanta*, printed in book form in 1875, he created an unforgettable character and preached his own cherished values of humanity and patriotism. In his *Samya* essays, reprinted collectively in 1879, he showed his sympathy for the common people and the peasantry, leaned towards egalitarianism and betrayed traces of the influ-

ence on him of utopian socialism. Then the wave of patriotic revivalism caught him up and in *Anandamath* published in book form in 1882, he gave a classic expression to such sentiments. The famous *Bande Mataram* hymn was included in this novel. Late in life, he turned to religious thought and endeavoured to vindicate the character of Krishna as depicted in our ancient books.

Bankim was the prophet of nationalism in literature, and yet Hindu revivalism with an excessive stress on the Hindu character and tradition seemed to speak out through him. His greatest achievement lay, however, in evolving a prose style which chalked out a middle path between the heavy chaste form of Vidyasagar and the vulgar colloquial idiom of Tek Chand Thakur.

#### *Experiments in Popular Style*

The latter was the pen-name of the Derozian Peary Chand Mitra, who along with his friend Radhanath Sikdar introduced a monthly magazine in the popular style of the spoken language in sharp distinction from its literary form. In 1858, Peary Chand Mitra wrote his *Alaler Gharer Dulal* in the new medium. He was seconded by the *Hutom Pyanchar Naksa* in 1862, written by Kaliprasanna Sinha. But the crusade for the popular style fizzled out in the glory of Bankim's language; its own adherents at best were half-hearted innovators, who did not stick to this path.

#### *Kaliprasanna Sinha (1840-70)*

Kaliprasanna Sinha himself was quite at home in the medium of heavier styles. His masterpiece was the translation of the Mahabharata in bulky tomes between 1860 and 1866. He was a man of varied interests but died when he was only thirty years old. He paid Long's fine in 1861 and also saved the *Hindoo Patriot* on the death of its unlucky editor.

Kaliprasanna was a public benefactor. We find him subscribing to the North-West Famine Fund in 1861 when Debendranath Tagore made a memorable appeal for relief. He sent Rs. 3,000 in aid of the Lancashire cotton operatives in 1862, when they were hard hit during the American civil war. He erected at his own cost fountains for the city of Calcutta. As a Justice of the Peace, he was a terror alike to native villains and foreign rogues. His Society for the Promotion of Learning gave public receptions to Madhusudan Datta (1861) and to Rev. James Long (1862).

*Minor Poets*

Apart from Madhusudan, Bengali poetry shone in a subdued manner in this period. Rangalal Banerji (1827–87) published his *Padmini Upakhyan* with its display of patriotic pride even before Madhusudan blazed out in all his glory. Patriotic verse became indeed an order of the day and inspired Hem Chandra Banerji (1838–1903) and Nabin Chandra Sen (1847–1909) who also wrote epics which had a certain vogue of popularity. Important for the future was Biharilal Chakravarti (1835–94) who went in for romantic lyricism, which attracted little attention at the time but later inspired the youthful muse of Rabindranath Tagore.

*Dwarkanath Vidyabhushan (1820–86)*

Another remarkable figure of this epoch was Dwarkanath Vidya-bhushan, professor at Sanskrit College and an eminent journalist. In reaction against the vulgarities of the Bengali press, he founded the weekly *Somprakas* (1858) and for two decades wielded his powerful pen in a fearless fight against every injustice, upholding every noble cause, toning up the whole of educated society.

*Rajendralal Mitra (1822–91)*

Bengali historical scholarship was inaugurated by Rajendralal Mitra in a parallel line to the creative literary forms. Already in the last decade before the mutiny, he was assistant secretary and librarian to the famous Asiatic Society founded and fostered by a succession of the great orientalist scholars from the West who first unearthed ancient Indian history. After the mutiny, he became its secretary and ultimately its president in 1885. This was worthy recognition of a man who knew a dozen languages and wrote about 50 learned books.

Rajendralal was our first eminent historical research scholar and was recognised as such by international societies and foreign scholars. He was also deeply attached to the Bengali language and culture. He coined technical terms and drew up maps in Bengali. He wrote patriotic text-books and learned essays. The Saraswat Samaj, organised in 1882 as a Bengali academy, had him as its president but it failed to take root. In 1851 and in 1863, he founded two illustrated learned periodicals in Bengali. He took some part in public activities and agitation as well, in his own day, as one of the prominent citizens.

*Other Intellectual Activities*

Two other minor efforts may be noted in passing. The Bengal Social Science Association was founded in 1867 to discuss papers on various topics and in 1876, Dr Mahendralal Sarkar, a famous homeopath, established the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science in the first effort to stimulate scientific research. It may be added that the Calcutta University, started during the mutiny days, was catering to higher education and turning out, year by year, distinguished alumni and ministered to the needs of the whole of Upper India. In the wake of British rule, cultivated Bengalis were carrying the torch of their renaissance to other parts.

## RELIGIOUS REFORM AND REVIVALISM

Next to literature and learning, the period saw the flowering of religious and social reform. Religious revivalism also began to lift up its head and protested against the impact from the West. This was the age of Keshab Chandra Sen and the Young Brahmos on the one hand, and on the other of the Wahabi unrest, beginnings of neo-Hinduism, and Ramkrishna Paramhansa.

*Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-84)*

Keshab Chandra Sen came from a famous family and even as a student showed his deep interest in social service and religious thought. He ran a night school for the needy in 1856, a Goodwill Fraternity in 1857, and became known for his talent as a speaker.

In the year after the mutiny, Keshab Chandra joined the Brahmo Samaj and within the next few years proceeded to stir it up from the stagnation into which it had fallen after the great days of the Tatva-bodhini movement. He put such fire into Brahmoism that it became a real power in the land as an organisation, and young men flocked into the church as never before or since. He started a Brahmo Vidyalaya or school in 1859, ran a Sangat Sabha for religious discourses from 1860, took up the editorship of the *Indian Mirror* founded in 1861.

In the service of Brahmoism he turned a whole-timer in 1861 and next year the Maharshi himself greeted this dynamic young man as Brahmananda. A religious Bengali journal — the *Dharmatatva* — came out in 1864 and a Brahmo Friend's Society was organised next year.

Keshab Chandra was not content with the passive inculcation of the

new faith by its old leaders. In 1864–65, he launched out on mission tours, breaking new ground and appearing as an all-India figure. In East Bengal, he aroused enthusiasm and alarm and in district towns Brahmo groups and individuals lifted their heads, went ahead and faced persecution.

With Keshab as the centre, radicalism within the Brahmo Samaj began to take shape and directed its criticism against the old leaders. Debendranath Tagore had abandoned — under the influence of Akshay Kumar Datta — the belief in the Vedic infallibility. But in ritual and practice he clung to old ways, always afraid of widening the gulf between his movement and the parent Hindu community. Under Keshab, the younger Brahmos demanded that Brahmo preachers who had not discarded the Brahmin symbol of the sacred thread should be denied access to the pulpit, that in the church services women should join the congregation, that inter-caste marriages should be promoted.

Keshab organised the Brahmo youth in a council, the Brahmo women in a society. A split became unavoidable and, in 1866, Keshab broke away from the original church and founded the Brahmo Samaj of India. His fame as an orator spread and he was honoured and acclaimed in England in 1870.

In 1872, we find him running a commune with his band of co-workers. All-round reform endeavour attracted him still. A Civil Marriage Act was secured in 1872 to legalise unorthodox casteless marriages. A pice daily came out and Keshab issued stirring calls to workers to wake up and assert their rights. Night schools for workmen were run by his associates.

### *The Young Brahmos*

Keshab Chandra Sen drew round him fiery young men who soon began to outstrip him in forward thinking. They included the scholar and man of letters, Sivanath Sastri; the social reformer, Durgamohan Das from Barisal; Dwarkanath Ganguli from Dacca, the ardent champion of women's emancipation and downtrodden people; the gentle but daring Ananda Mohan Bose from Mymensingh.

The Young Brahmos grew more and more critical of Keshab's leadership and his alleged high-handedness in running the church. Their democratic sense was offended by the adulation of Keshab by his devoted disciples, by the trend of mystic sentiment which was growing up in his outlook. The break came when Keshab allowed his own minor daughter to marry the chief of Coochbehar under the old rites.

defying the new marriage conventions growing up within the church at his own instance. Keshab's defence of the Coochbehar marriage as a special case angered them even more.

The Young Brahmos revolted and set up the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj in 1878. This was given a democratic constitution and its Bengali organ solemnly declared in 1882 that the Brahmo ideals included not merely religious radicalism but also the universal liberation of all people under the banner of democratic republicanism.

The Young Brahmos threw themselves whole-heartedly into the political movements of the day; national leaders like Surendranath Banerji were their close associates. As early as 1876, a band of them under Sivanath's leadership proclaimed their faith in independence, forswore service under the alien government, but promised to work in a peaceful way in view of the circumstances of the country. Their organ, the *Brahmo Public Opinion*, took its full share in the political agitation of the day.

It is interesting to note that this uncompromising consistent radicalism of the Young Brahmos attracted to them the last representatives of Young Bengal, Sibchandra Deb and Ramtanu Lahiri. But after the Coochbehar split, the followers of Keshab leaned more heavily towards emotionalism and his church took on the mantle of what was called the new dispensation or a synthesis of all religions.

### *Temperance*

A minor issue in social reform was focused by the untiring zeal of Peary Charan Sarkar who founded the Temperance Association in 1863 with two monthly organs. The drink evil was fought back with success and society was largely rescued from the legacy of Young Bengal — the curse which had sent to their death brilliant young men like Harish Chandra Mukherji and Kaliprasanna Sinha, the scandal which was pilloried in the satiric plays of Dinabandhu Mitra and Madhusudan Datta.

### *Hindu Revivalism*

The offensive under Keshab Chandra Sen and the Young Brahmos came up in due course against a volume of orthodox resistance. There was of course an amount of shocked conservative sentiment roused to anger by the encroachment in practice, and not merely in theory, on the cherished customs of respectable society. The Brahmo intransigence was a collective movement, and therefore more dangerous than the individual waywardness of Young Bengal.

Orthodoxy retaliated by social persecution which made many young men drawn to the new faith leave their ancestral homes. In the ranks of the old society there was also some uneasiness at the moral stature of the protestant movement, and this took the form of scoffing at Brahmo puritanism. Orthodox society also tried to rationalise its instinctive resistance, and even Bankim Chandra Chatterji reacted in this manner.

The political awakening was rousing intense pride and self-confidence and in view of the backwardness of the Muslim people it naturally tended to take on a Hindu garb more decisively than before. Patriotic writers invariably glorified not merely the ancient Indian culture with its predominantly Hindu structure; they also began to dwell upon the struggles of the Rajputs, the Marathas, the Sikhs as instances of the freedom urge. As it happened all these peoples had as their adversaries — the Muslims, and the Hindu trend in the national sentiment was intensified with a not very happy consequence.

#### *Ramkrishna Paramhansa (1836–86)*

In Hindu revivalism, however, there was one element of great charm, sweetness and grace. This emanated from the saint of Dakshineswar, Ramkrishna Paramhansa, who cast a spell over a myriad of votaries. He was an illiterate Brahmin who by sheer character, personal magnetism and homely wisdom stormed the hearts of thousands and earned the respect of even those who could not agree with his preachings. By teaching the sanctity of all faith, he undermined protestant militancy and reassured the shaken spirit of the traditionalists. A great organisation of social service later on drew its inspiration from him and countless Hindus gave him homage for years to come.

#### *Muslim Revivalism*

In striking contrast we have the Muslim revivalism in the Wahabi movement which had repercussions on Bengal still obscurely known. Wahabism started from Arabia as a puritan upsurge and has been aptly described as anabaptist in faith, red republican in politics. A contemporary of Rammohun imported it into India, and Patna became a leading centre of the new cult. It agitated the downtrodden Bengal Muslim peasantry in certain areas.

A Wahabi was the most important peasant leader during the Indigo Strike. His son, Amiruddin, was imprisoned for sedition in 1871. The Wahabis supplied the first political convicts for transportation. They were the first terrorists. The Chief Justice in Calcutta was murdered on



20 September 1871. When the assassin, Abdullah, was executed, the authorities in a panic would not allow the burial of the corpse but had it cremated. A booklet on the *Wahabi Trials* issued by the movement had a large circulation in Bengal. On 8 February 1872, the Wahabi convict, Sher Ali, killed Viceroy Mayo while he was visiting the penal settlement in the Andamans.

#### NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The flowering of the renaissance in the realms of literature and religion is naturally in full evidence in the field of national political consciousness. We see here a vehement assertion of national sentiment with the emphasis on its Hindu tone. There is also the first faint glimmering of a Muslim national consciousness. Noticeable also is the beginning of sustained political agitation. We are at last approaching the Congress era.

#### *Rajnarayan Bose (1826–99) and His Associates*

On the morrow of the mutiny, Hindu national consciousness in itself crystallised round the figure of Rajnarayan Bose who was linked up with the conservative Brahmos. In 1861, he founded at Midnapur a Society for the Promotion of National Glory and issued a prospectus for a Society for Stimulating National Sentiment.

In a famous lecture Rajnarayan asserted Hindu superiority as the keynote of his movement. One of his allies was Bhudev Mukherji who for half a century after the mutiny wrote essays and historical pieces and even advocated Hindi as the language of Indian unity.

The word “national” acquired such charm in those days that an associate of Rajnarayan, Nabagopal Mitra, started a national school, a national press, a national paper, and a national gymnasium till his countrymen came to refer to him as “National Mitra”. He along with Rajnarayan and Jyotirindranath, a son of Debendranath Tagore, founded the Patriots’ Association in 1865. But their greatest achievement was the organisation of an annual fair—the Hindu Mela—which for several years was an event of great activity.

#### *The Hindu Mela*

It began in 1867 and was organised by Rajnarayan, Nabagopal and the young Tagores. The popularity of the indigenous form of the mela or the fair was utilised by the organisers to attract attention and sup-

port and succeeded in gathering and stimulating vast crowds of people in annual gatherings. Its main objects were defined by Ganendranath Tagore to be the cultivation of national sentiment and the promotion of the spirit of self-help and it rallied to it a great volume of enthusiastic support.

At the annual sessions, prizes were offered to writers, artists and athletes and big exhibitions were organised to display the varied products of Indian arts and crafts, to encourage Indian producers, to educate the general public about their own country. The patriotic Bengali orations of Manomohan Bose became a feature of such gatherings. Singing of patriotic songs began at the sessions, the first hymn being composed by a son of the Maharshi, Satyendranath Tagore, who had become the first Indian I.C.S. in 1863.

There was a burst of patriotic poetry also, and indeed in the entire range of contemporary literature, including Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the impress of the Hindu Mela movement is very clear. For about a decade these annual meetings stirred up all Calcutta.

### *Muslim Consciousness*

In contradistinction to the Hindu national sentiment, the awakening amongst the Muslims was still very feeble, if we leave out the Wahabi unrest. The Calcutta gentry included only a handful of Muslims. A National Mohammedan Association was in existence and its principal figure was Nawab Abdul Latif. These were aristocratic Muslims, but the bourgeoisie growing up under British rule was as yet singularly devoid of a Muslim element.

Wherever we turn, we see no Muslim at all prominent. Characteristically enough, there was no uneasiness on that score in Hindu ranks waking up to national consciousness. Syed Ahmad, however, founded the Aligarh College in 1874 and the repercussion of his movement was bound to be felt later on.

### *Sustained Political Agitation*

The rather militant Hinduism of the Hindu Mela was a little softened in the seventies and the national consciousness took on a wider form to include other elements like the militant Brahmos and their associates. The result was sustained political agitation of a modern type and free use of western ideas and technique which tended to eclipse the methods of the Hindu Mela and were more political. This in its turn led on directly to the emergence of the Congress.

*Sisir Kumar Ghose (1840–1911)*

One of the leaders in the transition was Sisir Kumar Ghose, who with his brothers had founded the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in 1868 to carry on sustained political criticism of the government. In 1870, he put forward a clear demand for western parliamentary institutions for India. Later, he agitated for popular representation in the Calcutta Corporation. He tried to link up the people's associations founded in the district towns and campaigned for the democratisation of the membership of the British Indian Association founded in 1851. The other young nationalists, however, disagreed with him in his management of the association and broke away from him.

*Surendranath Banerji (1848–1925)*

A new leader was at hand and was destined to rise to great heights in leadership and to be acclaimed later on as the "uncrowned king" of Bengal. His tenacity in political agitation earned him from the Englishmen the sobriquet of "Surrender Not" — in a pun on his personal name. Surendranath had gone into the Indian Civil Service but was discharged on trivial grounds from the "heaven-born service" by official superiors who were not yet accustomed to have Indians within their close preserve.

By 1875, Surendranath turned to politics. He was very close to the Young Brahmos, one of whom, Anandamohan Bose, had founded a Students' Association. Under the auspices of the association, Surendranath started his public speaking. His great addresses on the rise of the Sikh Power and Mazzini created a sensation and made him the idol of the youth. He held up before them not merely the freedom struggles in India but the great episodes in the liberation of the West as well, and made his audience thrill in sympathy with the Italy of the Risorgimento or Ireland of the Home Rule movement.

Surendranath Banerji was not merely the unquestioned chief of Bengal for a generation, he became also an all-India leader of the first magnitude. From 1879, he had his organ — the *Bengalee*.

*Indian Association (1876)*

Surendranath and his friends broke away from Sisir Kumar Ghose and founded the Indian Association in July 1876. The group included Anandamohan Bose, the first Indian wrangler in Cambridge and a barrister, Sivanath Sastri, who had resigned from government service and was an established man of letters, Dwarkanath Ganguli, the fiery

agitator for human rights — all of whom were leaders in the Young Brahmo movement. The eminent veteran chief of Young Bengal, Reverend Krishnamohan Banerji, was chosen as the president of the association in fitting recognition of the services of a bygone generation.

The Indian Association took up consciously the role of organising Indian public opinion. The membership dues were deliberately fixed at a much lower level than the ordinary rate for the lower classes. Branches were opened in the districts and links established with organisations outside Bengal.

### *A Series of Campaigns*

An agitation for the reform of civil service regulations which were capriciously barring the access of Indians to higher appointments led Surendranath Banerji to undertake tours in different provinces in 1877–78. The diversion of the famine fund to the Afghan War led to a great outcry in 1878, government responded with repression; the Press Act, 1878, gagged the vernacular newspapers and the Arms Act of 1878 prohibited the keeping of arms by Indians. The association campaigned for the rights of the tenants, encouraged the formation of ryots' unions and its orators addressed huge mass meetings in the districts attended by, we are told, from ten to twenty thousand people at some places.

Finally, there was the Ilbert Bill issue. When in 1882, legislation was proposed authorising the trial of Europeans by Indian officers, there was a European outcry against it as during the Black Act days, and the Indians counter-campaigned with energy. In 1883, Surendranath was imprisoned for contempt of court amidst popular indignation. The tempo of national agitation mounted up steadily. Sustained political pressure combined with the Gladstonian liberalism of Viceroy Ripon led to the Local Self-government and Tenancy Acts of 1885 and the repeal of the Press Act of Lord Lytton. Ripon earned a deep gratitude from the Indian public thereby.

### *Stabilised Politics*

Out of the turmoil of early eighties arose the idea of starting a national fund to furnish the sinews of political warfare. A public meeting on 17 July 1883 was addressed by Surendranath on this matter and he toured again in 1884 in this connection.

Then, the Indian Association called an All-India National Conference which met in Calcutta in December 1883, and passed resolutions

on representative government, repeal of the Arms Act, civil service reform, technical education. The veteran Derozian, Ramtanu Lahiri, presided at the opening. The second session of the conference met in Calcutta in December 1885, and unwittingly coincided with the gathering of the National Congress in Bombay.

## V 1885-1905

### NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND NATIONAL CONGRESS

Ten years of campaigning by the Indian Association under leaders like Surendranath Banerji, following a decade of growing consciousness promoted by the annual sessions of the Hindu Mela, had formed the prelude to the emergence of an all-India platform for national consciousness. The first National Conference of 1883 was the logical outcome of this process. Yet the first steps in the formation of the Indian National Congress were taken by other circles to the exclusion of popular leaders in Bengal. The Congress came as a surprise to the Bengal nationalists.

#### *Genesis of the Congress 1885*

Political consciousness had also awakened in other regions in India, notably in Bombay. But the leaders elsewhere were in general more moderate and less vocal. Allan Octavian Hume, a Scottish civilian, had, after retirement from service, settled at Simla in 1882, and was taking a great deal of interest in politics. He had a sincere love for India and in 1883 urged the graduates of Calcutta University in a famous letter to dedicate themselves to the service of their country.

In the same year, he formed an Indian National Union with local committees in the principal cities. He got in touch with moderate Indian leaders and assembled them in a session at Bombay in December 1885, which constituted itself as the National Congress.

This move had the approval of Viceroy Dufferin who thought that the role of the Congress would be the respectful ventilation of public grievances, that the Congress should be something like "His Majesty's Opposition" in England but, of course, with no chance of getting into power. The prospect of another mutiny flitted across the government's imagination now and again, and here was the chance of laying the ghost.

The popular leaders of Bengal were arranging for their second National Conference when Hume and his friends summoned the Bombay meeting. Surendranath and the "sedition-mongers" were not even invited though the presidentship went to a respectable Bengali lawyer, W. C. Banerji.

### *Fusion 1886*

The second session of the National Congress was to meet in Calcutta. It was no longer possible to keep out the famous Bengal agitators. Thus in 1886 there was virtually a fusion between the older National Conference and the newer but wider National Congress. As the *Report* put it: "the leading characteristic of the Congress of 1886 was that it was the whole country's Congress". Unlike the first session, elected delegates representing diverse organisations and groups of people came to this meeting. Another feature was the local Reception Committee presided over by the veteran scholar, Rajendralal Mitra.

The widening of the range of the Congress was unpalatable to government and as early as the Fourth Allahabad Session, 1888, there were signs of official displeasure and obstruction. But the popularity of the Congress was already assured. In the Third Madras Session, 1887, we find small subscriptions from ordinary people swell up the funds of the Reception Committee and a few artisan delegates participated in the meeting.

### *Bengali Participation in the Congress*

Bengal naturally took a leading share in the work of the early Congress, the way to which had been paved by the growth of Bengali political consciousness in the preceding generation. In the first twenty-one annual sessions of the Congress (1885–1905), the presidential chair went to Bengalis on no less than seven occasions — to W. C. Banerji (1885, 1892), Surendranath Banerji (1895, 1902), Anandamohan Bose (1898), Ramesh Chandra Datta (1899) and Lalmohan Ghose (1903).

At every session except the very first, Bengal delegates had their due share in the proceedings. They led the protest, for example, against imprisonment without trial and criminal law amendments (1897), against Viceroy Curzon's University Commission (1902), against official extravagance at the Delhi Durbar (1903). They had their full share in the Congress committees, for instance in the industrial and educational committees appointed in 1900.

*Bengali Pressure towards Forward March*

More remarkable and fitting was the part played by Bengal congressmen in pressing for the liberalisation of Congress. Some of them protested in the Second Session against the drafting of the resolutions by one or two leaders; and in the Third Session, 1887, Dwarkanath Ganguli and Bepin Chandra Pal, a young Brahmo from Sylhet, forced the institution of an elected Subjects Committee for discussing and drafting resolutions to be placed before the Open Session. The Congress at first shelved the plantation labour problem in Assam as a provincial issue when Dwarkanath Ganguli raised the question in 1887; by the Twelfth Session (1896), it was forced to take the matter up due to the pressure from Bengal.

Another forward demand was for women's representation and the first women delegates in 1889 and 1890 included Kadambini Ganguli, the wife of Dwarkanath and the first lady graduate of Calcutta University. She was the first woman to speak from the Congress platform (1890), as "a symbol that Indian freedom would uplift India's womanhood".

*Genesis of Congress Extremism*

The founders of Congress believed in the periodic presentation of the national grievances in a solemn fashion to the British government which was expected to yield step by step before public opinion. More and more, Surendranath Bancrji and the official Bengal leadership also inclined to the same view and felt instinctively that mere oratory would confuse and confound the rulers. Congress spent a large sum of money year after year in England to publicise its propaganda.

All this formed the famous "moderate" trend which dominated the Congress and against this there was a definite opposition which developed into the "extremism" of the next period. Along with Maharashtra and the Punjab, Bengal was a good soil for the genesis of extremism. Internal consolidation rather than mere demonstration, self-help rather than petitions, going deeper amongst the people rather than following the routine of the beaten track — such was the mentality of extremism. One of the earliest Bengali exponents of the new move was Aswini Kumar Datta, the celebrated local leader in Barisal who had a unique hold on his own district and was venerated by an entire generation. As early as 1887, he presented to the Congress a memorial for representative government bearing 45,000 signatures from Barisal.

He campaigned amongst his own people against the government policy of encouraging unrestricted production of intoxicants in the countryside. In 1897, he protested against the role of the Congress being confined to the annual three days' "tamasha". Even more vocal and effective as a critic was Bepin Chandra Pal round whom gathered the nascent extremist sentiment. He founded an organ, the *New India*, in 1902, and had already made his mark in the struggle on behalf of the Assam plantation labourers.

### *Fight for the Assam Coolies*

This campaign had been initiated by the indefatigable Dwarkanath Ganguli who had heard from a Brahmo missionary about the miserable plight of the coolies in Assam tea-gardens and proceeded there, in 1886, to collect facts on behalf of the Indian Association. He toured the plantations at the risk of his own life and embodied his findings in a series of articles on the "Slave Trade in Assam" in the English journal *Bengalee* and the vernacular *Sanjibani* which was conducted by a young Brahmo, Krishna Kumar Mitra. As Congress treated the question as a provincial issue, the matter was taken up by the Bengal Provincial Conference in 1888 when Bepin Chandra Pal was the main speaker.

The ignorant and illiterate labourers from different provinces were being enticed to the tea-gardens and persuaded to enter into agreements or indentures under which they were held down to servitude for years, though such "agreements" were strictly illegal. Conditions in the plantations were a scandal and cases occurred in which recalcitrant coolies were flogged to death. Ordinary law and justice ceased to operate in the tea-gardens where planters reigned supreme. The agitation, thus unleashed, was like another Indigo Campaign. By 1896, Congress was finally persuaded to take up the problem till Sir Henry Cotton, Chief Commissioner of Assam, was moved to action and the worst evils were eradicated.

### *Patriotic Consciousness in Bengal*

Meanwhile political life in Bengal was forging ahead. The Bengal Provincial Conference was organised in 1888 to activate the people of the province, Dr Mahendralal Sarkar presiding over the first session. It was Bengal's lead which got together, in 1896, the first Industrial Exhibition as an adjunct to the Congress session which in the words



of Surendranath heralded "the industrial upheaval that was soon to find expression in the swadeshi movement".

The economic endeavours of the Hindu Mela a generation before were now finding their fulfilment and men and women connected with the House of Tagore were prominent again in this direction. Thus the Industrial Exhibition was sponsored by J. Chowdhuri and, early in the present century, Sarala Devi opened the Lakshmir Bhandar, to popularise country-made products. This swadeshi stores ran a journal — the *Bhandar*.

In 1903 was founded the Dawn Society with its organ in the *Dawn* — an association of patriotic young men led by Satish Chandra Mukherji. An Association for the Advancement of Industrial and Scientific Education was organised by Jogendranath Ghose to secure scholarships for the technical training of young students to be sent abroad for the purpose. Agitation flared up from time to time provoked by every encroachment on rights or sentiments.

In 1899, there was a great outcry against the ominous reduction of representation in the Calcutta Corporation; the majority of the elected members led by Surendranath resigned in protest. There was fierce anger at Viceroy Curzon's slandering of the Bengali national character in his convocation address in 1905; Rashbehari Ghose, the eminent lawyer, presided over the public meeting which answered Curzon.

Bengal was indeed steadily approaching the great swadeshi upheaval. It was equally clear that Bengal's individual national consciousness was far developed and was ready to take up any challenge.

### *Swami Vivekananda (1862–1902)*

The general national resurgence was, of course, not limited to political consciousness and agitation. National strength, self-confidence, energy and pride seemed embodied in the figure of Swami Vivekananda, a young Bengali disciple of Ramkrishna Paramhansa.

Vivekananda had turned away from the beaten track of ordinary life and was fired with a burning idealism. He dramatically leaped into fame by his participation in the World Religions Conference at Chicago, 1893, and this was followed by a triumphant mission tour of the West for four years. On his return home in 1897, he was acclaimed as a national hero. At home and abroad, he produced a deep impression.

Like Rammohun Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen he had added to the stature of his country in the estimation of foreigners; but unlike them, he was no protestant but an orthodox Hindu and thus stimulated

the Hindu revivalist sentiment. Indian self-respect felt reassured when Vivekananda was hailed abroad as the cultural ambassador of an ancient land. To his own countrymen, his message was the cult of self-help; he told them that they themselves were largely responsible for their own evil plight and the remedy was in their own hands.

Vivekananda was a fiery patriot, though politics was not his line. He turned to humanitarian monasticism and proceeded to organise the famous Ramkrishna Mission with its centre at Belur, near Calcutta. Countless young men forsook the world and began to flock into the mission which emphasised the role of social service and recalled the self-sacrificing ardour of the medieval friars.

### *Muslim Consciousness*

And yet weaknesses persisted. Among these was the continued absence of active Muslim support on any considerable scale. Eminent Muslim individuals were with the Congress, but already had begun a distinct turning away of Muslim opinion towards an independent path.

Syed Ahmad was a patriot as his Urdu book on the causes of the Mutiny on the morrow of the upheaval indicates. He also felt deeply the national humiliation and racial discrimination. But more and more he leaned on the view that the uneven development between the two communities involved Hindu domination if political emancipation was unaccompanied by safeguards for the weak. When Congress arose, he tried to counter it with his Patriotic Association. In the Civil Service Commission, 1888, he took his stand against holding simultaneous examinations in India for recruitment to the I.C.S. which Congress was demanding; his argument was that the Hindus would thereby swamp the service.

Even before this, in 1883, Mahommed Yusuf had demanded in the Bengal Council the reservation of seats for Muslims. The Congress notionalists universally condemned the Muslim moves as reactionary; they were strengthened in their belief by the fact that there were Muslims with the Congress also. Muslim demands were dismissed as religious or communal and the point was missed that while the Muslim divines on the whole were friendly to the Congress, the Muslim slogans expressed the self-interests of those sections of the middle classes which were backward and happened to be Muslim.

As for the masses, the stock argument in Hindu circles was that there was no separatist feeling. Poet Tagore answered the point in

1911: "The lack of separatist feeling is merely negative; it has no positive content. That is to say, it was not because of our genuine unity that we were insensible of our differences — it was only because of a lack of virility in ourselves that we were overwhelmed by a certain insensibility."

#### LITERATURE AND CULTURE

In literature and the life of culture, Bengal's position had already been secured by the previous generation. The flowering of the renaissance persisted. The Bengali theatre reached its classic form under playwright actors like Girish Chandra Ghose. Ramesh Chandra Datta followed the tradition of Bankim and wrote historical romances and social novels, though he earned more enduring fame as an economic historian who analysed the material evils of British domination in India.

The first noteworthy woman writer was Swarnakumari Devi (1855–1932), a daughter of Debendranath Tagore, who capably edited for a decade (from 1884) the cultural magazine *Bharati* founded in 1877 by her philosopher brother, Dwijendranath.

One Muslim poet and novelist, Meer Mosharraf Husain (1848–1912), wrote his best work in this period.

Another achievement began with the first efforts of Jagadish Chandra Bose and Prafulla Chandra Ray who sent a thrill through the Indian mind by unlocking the closed door of scientific research. But everything was overshadowed by the emergence of the genius of Rabindranath Tagore in the field of Bengali culture.

#### *Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)*

As a boy, young Rabindranath had attracted attention by reciting his own poems at the Hindu Mela (1875, 1877) on patriotic themes, and by lyric poems in the Vaishnava style and critical reviews. In the early eighties, he wrote and acted in plays, attacked in an article the opium trade in China, and was hailed as a talented young poet.

In 1884, he denounced the prevalent practice in political agitation of petitioning to the British, in very strong language. In the next few years, his poems, songs, plays, stories, novels and essays gave him the position of a master writer and added to the glories of Bengali literature. He conducted a high class monthly, the *Sadhana*, and in 1901 revived the famous *Bangadarshan* periodical of Bankim Chandra.

In 1895, Rabindranath tried to collect the nursery rhymes of Bengal;

in the previous year he had been elected the foundation vicepresident of the Academy of Bengali Letters — the Sahitya Parishad. His width of view was revealed in his sharp polemic against the absurdities of extreme neo-Hinduism and in his essays on woman labour and unemployment.

In 1892, he advocated the introduction of Bengali as the medium of instruction in higher educational institutions. He wrote and delivered remarkable political addresses at regular intervals voicing the wounded national sentiment and urging internal consolidation of the national movement. In 1898, we find him assisting the great-hearted Sister Nivedita in the organisation of plague relief in the city.

In 1901, Rabindranath founded his famous school at Santiniketan. In 1904, he stressed the need for constructive nationalism and pleaded for the reorganisation of social life on the basis of self-help with the village as the unit, the fostering of cottage industries, peasant cooperation and Hindu-Muslim amity. He inclined towards the growing extremist trend in national politics and, in 1904, he supported the move to celebrate the Sivaji Festival which was to bring together the two most advanced peoples in India; and yet in the midst of this enthusiasm, he had the good sense to point out that the public worship of the goddess Bhowani as part of the festival was sure to alienate non-Hindu sentiment.

By 1905, Rabindranath Tagore was universally recognised not merely as our greatest poet but also a worthy representative of our culture with his catholicity, sympathy, strength and sanity.

## VI 1905–1919 PARTITION OF BENGAL AND SWADESHI

Bengal's growing national consciousness had alarmed the authorities who now fell back upon a plan to break the back of the movement by partitioning the province into two separate entities. The Muslim people who had not been drawn into the general awakening formed the big majority in the eastern districts. It was presumed that they would welcome the creation of a province which they would dominate. The Hindus, it was expected, would be split up and beaten by this stroke of policy. On 20 July 1905, the Partition of Bengal was announced as an administrative measure to take effect from 16 October.

*Reply to the Challenge*

It was a challenge to the national movement and the freedom urge of the Bengali people thrown out by imperialism and the challenge was picked up at once. Krishna Kumar Mitra gave a call on the same day in his *Sanjibani* which carried as its motto the famous slogan of the French Revolution, "liberty, equality, fraternity", a call for the boycott of foreign goods with a vow to use swadeshi goods only.

His lead met with immediate response from the people in Calcutta and outside, and huge meetings demonstratively abjured the use of foreign cloth. Rabindranath Tagore in his *Bangadarshan* proclaimed the determination of the Bengali people to stand united and rely on their own inherent strength to defy the attack on Bengal's unity. A mammoth demonstration in and round the Calcutta Town Hall on 7 August reaffirmed the national stand. The battle was now in full swing.

*Wave of Agitation*

The wave of agitation mounted up as never before. The country was flooded with patriotic songs by Rabindranath Tagore, Rajani Kanta Sen and others, with the fiery orations of Bepin Chandra Pal and a host of "agitators", with determined articles which covered every news-sheet.

Anglicised gentlemen abandoned their rich foreign dress, women came out of their seclusion to demonstrate, students marched out in processions and as pickets, countless homes discontinued foreign luxuries. Famous landlords, big businessmen, leading professional people went with the popular tide, though significantly enough we see no special effort to organise and arouse workers or peasants.

Prominent Muslims, however, joined the struggle including Abdul Rasul, the barrister, Guznavi, the businessman, and Liaquat Husain, the popular agitator. The excitement affected Calcutta and the districts equally. New organisations sprang up everywhere to carry on the struggle — the Brati Samiti of Manoranjan Guha Thakurta, the Bande Mataram group of Suresh Chandra Samajpati, and the Sanatan Sampaday of South Calcutta young men. Volunteers hawked the coarse country-cloth from door to door.

*The Ceremony of 16 October 1905*

On the date the partition took effect, there took place a unique and memorable demonstration of protest. The leaders adopted the popular

practice of tying the rakhi thread on the wrists of every friend followed on the rakhi purnima day, for a new use with special purpose. 16 October 1905 was observed with this ceremony and subsequent anniversaries were similarly marked till the partition was annulled. The tying of the thread was to symbolise the brotherly unity of the Bengali people which nobody can tear asunder. To mark the day as an occasion for mourning, people were called upon to abstain from cooked food. Huge crowds paraded the streets singing a song of Rabindranath specially composed for the occasion.

In the afternoon, the veteran leader, Anandamohan Bose, was taken to lay the foundation stone of a building which was to commemorate indivisible Bengal and to be called Federation Hall, in memory perhaps of the federation celebration during the great days of the French Revolution.

A solemn vow was taken by the multitude which had gathered at the meeting. A huge mass demonstration followed in the evening in North Calcutta where an appeal was made for funds to run weaving schools and help the handloom industry. Fifty thousand rupees were subscribed on the spot.

### *Constructive Activity*

The dominant bourgeois trend in the Bengal movement found a natural and useful outlet in the endeavour to build up home industries on the slogan: "Buy swadeshi". Textile mills, national banks, insurance companies, soap factories, tanneries and so forth blossomed out—with not much success in many cases, however. Prafulla Chandra Roy, the scientist, organised his famous concern—the Bengal Chemical. Swadeshi stores and similar stores of consumers' goods sprang up in large numbers. Another constructive activity developed out of the government repression of the patriotic students.

Circulars rained down upon the students to force them out of the national agitation. The police clashed with student pickets. Even the veteran Sivanath Sastri issued a call to the students to leave the existing institutions.

In a protest meeting on 9 November 1905, Subodh Chandra Mallik gave a princely donation of a lakh to start national education and was promptly hailed as a raja by his grateful countrymen. The Mymensingh zemindars followed suit with rich bequests. Next year, on 11 March 1906 was ultimately set up a National Council of Educa-

tion. One permanent memento of this upheaval stands till today in the Jadavpur Engineering College.

### *Struggle against Repression*

The campaign went on with unabated fury. The students forged an Anti-circular Society to fight the official decrees and repression which had even indulged in floggings. Districts vied with the metropolis in asserting their defiance. Foremost was Barisal — under Aswini Kumar Datta and his band of helpers — which was “proclaimed” as a notorious district and where the countryside was enthralled by the popular patriotic songs of Mukunda Das, a poet of the masses.

In Calcutta, on 27 February 1906, there was a bonfire of foreign cloth in College Square, to be followed by similar demonstrations elsewhere.

In April, the Provincial Conference met in Barisal town. The East Bengal government had prohibited the *Bande Mataram* slogan. In the conference procession, the young enthusiasts broke the ban and received in consequence a police lathi charge. The conference dispersed next day without functioning rather than submit to the ban, though it shrank from the suggestion of Krishna Kumar Mitra to continue proceedings and defy the official order.

### EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

The swadeshi movement naturally fanned the embers of extremism into a blazing flame. In June 1906, Tilak came to Calcutta and the Sivaji Festival was celebrated with great pomp. Sarala Devi organised the ‘beerastami’ celebrations as the festival of youth.

The trend of extremism rapidly crystallised round the figure of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya who crowned a chequered career as a prophet of militant nationalism. He cast a spell over young minds and drew them towards the gospel of direct action. His organ, the *Sandhya*, became a power in the land and intoxicated its readers. Charged with sedition, the intrepid monk agitator declined to plead in a court the jurisdiction of which he refused to acknowledge. He died on 27 October 1907, in the midst of his trial.

Others seconded his crusade, like Bepin Chandra Pal — already famous as politician and orator. He started the *Bande Mataram* newspaper, with the motto “India for the Indians”, as the editor of which Arabindo Ghose appeared like a stormy petrel in Bengal politics.

Arabindo had been educated in England, and had almost gone into the Indian Civil Service. Saved by an accident from this career, he emerged as a powerful writer who preached that nationalism was a divine religion with true poetic fervour.

Other radical papers included the *Nabashakti* and the *Yugantar*, the latter edited by Bhupendranath Datta who is a venerated scholar and progressive thinker even today. Extremist groups of action sprang up amongst the radical youths, for example, the Anushilan Samity.

The Congress sessions in 1906 and 1907, in spite of their acceptance of the goal of swaraj in 1906, became the battle ground between extremists and moderates. At the Surat Congress, 1907, the tension culminated in a split after which the machine was captured by the moderates and remained in their hands till the reunion in 1916 and the moderate withdrawal from the Congress itself in 1918.

### *Repression & Terrorism*

In 1907–08, government repression was in full swing and mainly directed against the extremists. The editors of the radical organs were charged with sedition in 1907. Bhupendranath Datta was sentenced, Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya died during trial, Arabindo Ghose was acquitted. Bepin Chandra Pal was imprisoned for contempt of court. An ordinance gagged “seditious” meetings. Another dealt with the press and the extremist organs were smashed. Punitive police forces realised collective fines from the swadeshi centres and some of the district leaders were jailed.

Furious with this repression, radical young men began to tread the path of violence. An attempt was made to blow up the train of Lieut. Governor Sir Andrew Fraser. On 30 April 1908, the Muzaffarpur incident took place when two terrorists tracking Kingsford, who had been the judge in the sedition trials, killed by mistake two English ladies. One of the assailants took his own life, the other was caught and hanged.

On 2 May the police unearthed a bomb factory in Maniktala, Calcutta, hauled in a group of terrorists and arrested Arabindo Ghose as well. The Alipur Bomb Case followed in consequence and during the trial the terrorists murdered an approver, the public prosecutor, and one of the police inspectors while a second attack was staged on Sir Andrew Fraser. Arabindo Ghose was acquitted again, thanks to his able counsel, C. R. Das, who became famous in this case. But the Maniktala group was convicted and the leaders transported for life.



Terrorism intensified government repression. The central legislature enacted a series of sweeping coercion acts which suppressed all freedom of the press, provided for conspiracy trials under special procedure and banned the youth organisations. Nine Bengal leaders including Aswini Kumar Datta and Krishna Kumar Mitra were deported in December 1908.

### *Muslim Reaction*

The antipartition agitation had drawn many Muslims to its fold, but they were pure nationalist individuals with hardly a solid following of their own people behind them. The Muslim masses were largely neutral during the struggle as befitted their lack of political consciousness.

The specifically Muslim leadership was pleased with the partition which held out hopes of preferment in the new province but the intensity of the national agitation and the ferocity of repression took it by surprise. This is reflected, for example, in the *Mussalman*, the organ Majibar Rahman founded in 1905. The eminent Muslims led by the Nawab of Dacca gave their approval to the partition at the Education Conference held in December 1906. Already on 1 October 1906, the Aga Khan had led a Muslim deputation to Viceroy Minto and pressed successfully upon him the safeguard of separate Muslim electorates in the coming constitutional reforms.

### *Separate Electorate*

The general argument in support of the new move was that, in the unavoidable circumstance in which the Indian franchise would depend on educational or property qualifications, the Muslim voters would be swamped in general electorates.

The Education Conference developed in 1908 in the Muslim League. In 1907, communal riots took place here and there. Still, it is by no means certain that the Muslim masses were enthusiastic for the partition. They were not developed enough even for that. That the swadeshi agitation on the other hand failed to rouse the predominantly Muslim peasant masses in East Bengal was candidly admitted by Rabindranath Tagore in his presidential address to the Provincial Conference at Pabna (February 1908) when he said that the fault lay with the Hindu "bhadralok" class, the gente-folk who had never cared to be at one with either their Muslim fellow countrymen or the masses of our own common people.

Muslim apathy either way is also illustrated by the absence of any strong opposition to the repeal of the partition announced by George V in his Coronation Durbar at Delhi, 12 December 1911. The Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909, however, conceded the principle of separate representation to soothe Muslim feeling.

### *The Eve & the Morrow of Partition-Repeal*

The new Constitution came into operation by the end of 1910 but taking advantage of a new terrorist action, the murder of a deputy superintendent of police, government renewed its repressive legislation. Under a new press law, for example, the next decade saw the forfeiture of several hundred presses, newspapers and books.

The leaders deported in 1908 were released, but one of them, Pulinbehari Das, the Anushilan chief, was transported to the Andamans for seven years on a new charge. Terroristic activities continued steadily and, in the context of the grim struggle which had opened in 1908 between terrorism and repression, even the repeal of the partition in 1911 failed to restore normalcy.

The removal of the imperial capital from Calcutta to Delhi also offended Bengali sensibility. Bengal was raised to the status of a governor's province on the reunion of its two parts.

### *The War Years*

An uneasy situation continued to haunt the Indian scene. In 1912 December, Viceroy Hardinge had a narrow escape from a bomb and amongst the accused was Rashbehari Bose who managed to flee from India. This was an indication of how Bengal terrorism had now its ramifications in other provinces. In 1914, the Komagata Maru affair provided a passing sensation and then came the first World War.

The moderates who dominated Congress loyally cooperated with the government in the war. The extremists under Tilak were now anxious for the re-establishment of Congress unity and the Lucknow Congress, 1916, saw the reunion made necessary by the possibility of an early end of the war.

The terrorists clung to their chosen path throughout the war years, tried to smuggle arms from abroad, and, in a skirmish near Balasore, lost one of their chiefs, Jatindranath Mukherji, the "Tiger" who was killed in action. In the Muslim ranks, we find the Muslim League moving closer to Congress. In 1912, the League accepted the Con-

gress ideal of self-government as its goal and there was a Congress-League Pact in 1916.

On the other hand, the years after 1911 saw an upsurge of Muslim intransigence which may be taken to represent the penetration of political consciousness deeper down in the Muslim people. The weekly *Comrade* founded in 1911 by Mahomed Ali indicated the new trend of militancy and mass agitation. The plight of Turkey during the Turco-Italian and the Balkan Wars attracted the sympathy of Indian Mussalmans who felt annoyed with Britain's dubious policy in the Near East.

In 1912, Dr Ansari led his Medical Mission to the relief of Turkey and the Red Crescent collected funds to mitigate Turkish sufferings. In 1914, Britain and Turkey found themselves on opposite sides in the war. The Indian Muslim, if he thought about it at all, was in a dilemma and his resentment against the British increased.

All this helped the growth of an anti-imperialist feeling which led on to the great khilafat agitation after the end of the war. Mahomed Ali and his friends were in detention during the war.

### *The Post-War Situation*

Even before the end of the war, Secretary of State Montague and Viceroy Chelmsford held an inquiry and recommended constitutional reforms (July 1918). The Congress extremists were firmly opposed to the meagre concessions offered. In the Calcutta Congress of December 1917, a split with moderates was narrowly averted, but Bengal nationalism rallied decisively round the extremist banner, under the new leadership of C. R. Das, and isolated Surendranath Banerji and the old guard of politicians. At the Special Congress in Bombay, August 1918, the long impending final breach at last took place. The moderates — hopelessly outnumbered — withdrew from the Congress, formed the Liberal League and supported the reform scheme.

The Congress was now entirely in the hands of the extremists. Meanwhile the First World War had stimulated Indian labour and its end marked the beginning of a trade union upsurge. The Rowlatt Act which tried to perpetuate the war time coercion laws provoked the post-war issue which rapidly developed into the new crisis of 1919. That was the year when M. K. Gandhi stepped forward and assumed the leadership of the national movement.

## LITERATURE AND CULTURE

The hectic days of the swadeshi movement followed by the uncertainties of the war period formed a framework within which Bengal's cultural life had its own ups and downs which cannot be traced in detail here. Unlike the previous periods, however, politics absorbed a great deal of attention and the situation was often tense.

*Tagore at Home and Abroad*

Rabindranath Tagore was now the unquestioned leader in the literary field. In 1905, he threw himself heart and soul into the swadeshi agitation and was the poet and the prophet of its early phase. His patriotic songs, speeches and essays lit up the whole movement with a peculiar beauty.

But as bitterness mounted up, Rabindranath's sensitive soul shrank from the ugly trends. He felt that his people needed a change of heart and that a radical social programme was absolutely necessary for the attainment of real independence. Disagreeing with the tactics of the movement, he withdrew into the solitude of his school and plunged into literary work which was now extra-ordinarily creative.

Tagore was also aiming at a mutual understanding between the East and the West and began his famous tours abroad. In 1913, he won the Nobel Prize for literature, but two years before, on the completion of his fiftieth year, his countrymen had already greeted him as the prince of literary men. In 1914, a high class Bengali periodical — the *Sabuj Patra* — appeared, and issue after issue was filled with the mature writings of Tagore.

In 1916, his lectures on nationalism delivered in Japan and the USA revealed him as a sharp critic of domineering aggression. His internationalism came in for some adverse criticism from his countrymen, but in reality he had never lost his sympathy for forward thought, though he was now politically inactive.

In 1917, Rabindranath intervened in the Bengal Congress on the side of extremism, and in 1919 his celebrated letter to the Viceroy on Jalianwala Bagh massacre gave a lead to the whole country before any other leader had spoken out.

*Varied Activity*

He had encouraged the formation of a significant movement in Bengal's cultural history — the Oriental School of Art of which the

central figure was his cousin, Abanindranath Tagore. Abanindra and his pupils consciously cultivated a new style of art which recalled the ancient past and stressed national individuality in self-expression. The stage was enriched by an avalanche of patriotic drama of which the highlights were the plays of Dwijendralal Ray whose songs enjoyed tremendous popularity.

On most poets, however, Tagore's genius had a baneful effect which discouraged individuality and produced a depressing atmosphere of cheap imitation. In prose, we have the new move of Pramatha Chaudhuri to break decisively with the established convention and to introduce into writing the spoken forms of words, especially the verbs which occur in Bengali speech. His journal — the *Sabuj Patra* — was intended to symbolise also the revolt of the youth against the shackles of tradition.

Earlier had come the Bengali magazine, the *Prabasi*, which the personality of its editor, Ramananda Chatterji, made into an expression of high class periodical literature. Ramananda Chatterji's famous "Monthly Notes" established his reputation as a patriot leaning heavily on the extremist side.

Dignity and thoughtfulness marked the prose writings of men like Ramendra Sundar Trivedi and Hirendranath Datta, both essayists of distinction; and of the historical researches of Haraprasad Sastri. A new form of literature, catering to the needs of children, was introduced by men like Jogindranath Sarkar, and Abanindranath Tagore shone in this line also.

In philosophy Brajendranath Seal emerged with his encyclopaedic knowledge and the power to inspire others. In science, Jagadish Chandra Bose added to his international reputation while Prafulla Chandra Ray began to build up a school of research scholars round him who looked up to him as their guru.

In the field of higher education there was the outstanding figure of Ashutosh Mukherji who by his devoted service and personality minimised the government control over Calcutta University, converted the institution from a pure examining body to a partly teaching one, opened the postgraduate teaching departments, organised the University College of Science, and launched the Bengali scholars into sustained research work in science and ancient history.

The Bengal we know today was emerging in these years in all its familiar outline.

## *Conflict within the Bengal Renaissance*

In the jubilee number of a journal devoted to the history of Bengal, a writer may perhaps crave indulgence for a broad yet concise review of an important aspect in our development, with some freedom for interpretative generalisation. I am taking this opportunity therefore of presenting before the academic audience certain tentative conclusions and reflections which I advanced in a Bengali essay on the occasion of the Tagore Centenary (English version in *Enquiry*, No. 5, 1961), elaborated further in two subsequent articles in the Bengali periodical 'Parichay'.

In a brief contribution of this nature, proper documentation is ruled out for lack of space. I can assure the reader, however, that my comments are based on a long study of the original writings of the protagonists of the 'awakening' in 19th century Bengal.

### I

THE 'RENAISSANCE' in Bengal lacked the tremendous sweep and vital energy of the many-sided upsurge in the midst of which was shaped its European prototype. Our movement had to function within the strait-jacket of a foreign semi-colonial regime. It did not have the advantage of springing originally from the rediscovery of a life-giving old culture. Rather it had to lean heavily in its first manifestations on an alien conquering world.

Yet the Bengal Renaissance has certainly its own specific relative value. Historians are now acutely conscious of the serious limitations of the renaissance in Europe itself; the old halo has largely faded. Our 'pre-renaissance' society, again was undoubtedly depressing; a recovery from the stupor has its own merit.

The guide-line for a proper assessment of what happened in the cultural life of 19th century Bengal must then steer between uncritical adulation and scornful rejection. A historical appreciation of the 'new life' in Bengal is possible, even after recognising its obvious weaknesses: it did move on the axis of the upper stratum alone of society, the 'bhadraloks'; it could not draw in the Muslim community and the masses of the backward Hindus; it failed to strike a consistent

anti-imperialist note, in sharp contrast to the role of the intellectuals in the Russia of the same period.

## II

The purpose of this essay is not a general estimate of the movement but the attempt at an outline analysis of the deep cleavage within it, the persisting conflict between different trends, different sets of ideals and values which moved our 19th century forefathers.

In a sense, of course, one cannot but notice the remarkable general awakening of the educated community, flowing into so many channels. It is usual to regard the contributions of gifted individuals as complementary to each other, to trace the manifestation of an intellectual upsurge in what is considered as a heroic age. Diversities seem to merge in a broad unified stream; each flower in the garland is our pride. Aesthetic achievement and patriotic political consciousness are the two best expressions of this unity in the movement.

A deeper view reveals, however, the not unnatural contradictions of opposed points of view, of conflicts in real life. Controversies arose; men were excited and disturbed; they often lashed out at each other; contemporaries had to judge and choose between rival trends. The historian also cannot avoid the task of assessing the implications of the clashing approaches in the light of the future development of our people. What appears at first sight as a unified stream breaks up into eddying cross currents.

In this conflict, we may discern two main trends, because of the persistence and constant reappearance of their intrinsic elements. I have used two convenient, though perhaps inexact, labels — Westernism (modernism, liberalism) and Orientalism (traditionalism, conservatism) — to distinguish the two conflicting trends. The terms obviously are drawn from the Russian analogy, from the historic 19th century fight between the Westerners and the Slavophiles, depicted, for example, in Masaryk's *Spirit of Russia*.

## III

It is easy to misunderstand the two terms I have used. Technically, Westernism does not mean a blind copying of Europe, just as Orientalism in our sense does not imply the aim at an impossible reversion to the past without any change. After all, the Russian Westerners and Slavophiles alike thought of the future, to be shaped by different ideals

though. Both again thought in terms of their own people, only their visions were different.

In distinguishing between two historic ideals, unessential unrepresentative aberrations have to be discarded. Our Westernism may properly be called so, because historically its impulse did come from the appreciation of certain European values reaching out largely through English education. Orientalism is a reaction against such foreign values which were thought inapplicable here. Westernism must not, therefore, be equated with wild living, dissolute habits, intemperance; very many of its exponents were free from such evils. Madhusudan pilloried the vices imbibed from a foreign culture, and Vidyasagar resolutely stuck to the Indian mode of life, though both were intellectually modernist. Westernism has no intrinsic connection also with the wide-spread common belief in the 'god-given' role of England in India. Again, Orientalism is not the same thing as the social persecution of the unorthodox which was common enough in our social life. Orientalism technically is not the equivalent of the crude occasional 'revivalism', obscurantist assertions, for example, of alleged Hindu anticipations of recent science. Orientalism is not identical with the simple life of India — the 'Anglicised' ostentatious set is often enough intellectually traditionalist. In using specific technical terms, one must think of the essential connotation, not subsidiary deviations from the logical norm.

It must also be remembered that we are not facing here two sharply demarcated clear-cut rival camps into one or other of which an individual can be neatly fitted in. Rather than two permanent groups, we have to think in terms of two abstract types of thinking — two rival logical concepts battling over the minds of men, who in concrete situations often wavered and swayed from pole to pole.

Complications naturally enough meet us at every turn. People do not always carry principles to their logical perfection. Rammohun disliked caste rules but would not renounce them publicly for fear of cutting himself adrift from the main current of his times; even the later Brahmo liberation of women stopped halfway as it were. The two trends might be reflected in the same person in different periods of their lives. Keshabchandra's early radicalism was followed by the later mystic conservatism; Tagore was a militant traditionalist in the Swadeshi days, but both before and after this epoch, from 1886 to 1898 roughly, and again ever since 1907 what dominated his social outlook was undoubtedly liberal modernist Westernism. Within the same period even, one might combine logically different approaches



into some kind of composite unity for oneself. Debendranath might link up radical monotheism with a good deal of social orthodoxy, on the issue of civil marriage, for instance; Bankimchandra freely used the rationalism and positivism of the West in defence of a basically traditional loyalty. Such complexities in real life, however, cannot eliminate the abstract logical distinction between the two main outlooks in 19th century Bengal.

#### IV

The first expression of liberal Westernism was the passion for social reform, the attack on traditional practices and institutions which now loomed as blind, irrational, and unjust: 'sati', ban on widow-marriage, polygamy, child-marriage, depressed status of women, caste-restrictions. The main goal was the relative liberation of women and a relaxation of rigid social rules.) Without a sustained reform movement, injustice would be prolonged, our conscience deadened, the national dignity lowered. The social readjustment which attracted our liberal reformers was of a type akin to the modernism of the West.

Social reform logically implied a second element, modern rationalism. Reformers like Rammohun or Vidyasagar quoted suitable extracts from the holy books in justification, but their original main impulse came surely from reasoning first, the relevant selective 'sastric' passages followed next. Old customs, institutions, ideas, beliefs were brought before the bar of reason, and the standard of judgment approached once more the liberal values of the West. The new education stirred up a rational temper, as in the Derozians, a spirit of questioning and rejection of tradition.

Rationalism in history is never a quest for absolute truth but a weapon for a new-found set of values, for a revolt against old ideals. In 19th century Bengal it grew up in association with Western humanism and the concept of individual human rights. In elaborating this, Tagore once quoted the immortal line of Burns — "a man's a man for a' that." This was indeed the expression, in theory at least, of the brightest side of the bourgeois culture of the West, the degradation of which in the practice of imperialist exploitation could be considered as a betrayal of the liberal values themselves. Throughout the ages India had indeed sought after spiritual freedom, but the overwhelming practice in our society had not set much store by the secular dignity of man as man.

Oriental Traditionalism, our second trend, negatively was a rejec-

tion of the trinity of the modernist Western approach — social reform, liberal rationalism, secular humanism.

To the traditionalists, social reform did not appear to be so very urgent after all. It would gradually come of itself; there was no need for excited agitation; there might even be something to be said for age-old venerable customs. In particular, social reform by legislation was anathema, an uncalled-for interference by an alien government; other kinds of legislation by the same authority were, however, meekly accepted. It was also felt that the cry for social reform would hurt our image in foreign eyes, though the opposite perhaps was likely to be its true consequence. Secondly, authority was held by the traditionalists to be a surer guide than anarchic self-seeking. 'Sastric' prescription and the established customs were sacrosanct on the whole, representing cherished ancestral wisdom; the reformers' quotations were arbitrary selections and misinterpretations. Thirdly, tested religious community life which holds society together had to the traditionalist a value higher far than that of individual humanistic self-seeking on a mundane level.

## V

Positively, traditional Orientalism implied first the worship of past glories — a natural reaction to foreign subjection. The cry went up — in what way are we less great? European scholars themselves were revealing India's past grandeur and there was a new appreciation of the immemorial sacred writings. Disturbed minds sought a natural refuge in the 'glorious tales of old'; there was a move to re-establish self-respect.

Our glorious past appeared, however, to be predominantly Hindu, springing from a social cohesion largely unshaken by the new storm and stress. Oriental traditionalism had thus a second element — the consciousness of Hindu superiority. India's civilization was almost equated with Hindu culture and India itself seemed to be essentially Hindu in its character. The fact that the 'awakened' educated community was almost exclusively Hindu by origin lent strength to such assumptions.

The third element in our second trend was mystic emotional spiritualism, dear to our traditional religious heritage. A revival of faith was indicated as the way to our salvation, a sure buttress against the encroaching tide of alleged new-fangled materialism beating upon our precious social citadel.

It is needless to point out that the liberal Westernist attitude would be logically, if not in every case, critical of the conservative Traditionalist values — adoration of the past, Hindu superiority, emotional faith.

✓The Westernist appreciation of our past was bound to be selective and hence critical of our heritage; picking and choosing instead of a total acceptance would be indicated.) The entire past cannot be worth worship as it contained so much which was held to be unjust and irrational. Much of the 'superior' Hindu tradition would then appear to be 'dated'; the conviction would grow that our future fabric cannot be a mere restoration, and must tower above Hindu-non-Hindu differences, must be built on the rights of man. Hindu consciousness can breed only arrogance and self-conceit. After all, a sizable portion of our people were non-Hindu, and even the Hindus themselves with their innumerable caste divisions were not homogenous. Finally, a quiet personal religion was certainly not incompatible with liberal modernism. But institutionalised devotion with a sacred indispensable priesthood and rigid obligatory rites, flooding social life, was likely to distract attention from ardent social reform, critical rational analysis, ideals of secular human rights for individuals.

## VI

A third trend is discerned by many observers, a synthesis of liberal modernism and conservative traditionalism. The seeker after synthesis finds it often in 19th century Bengal — in Rammohun, Bankimchandra, Rabindranath, Vivekananda — indeed so often that the whole thing begins to look dubious. The true synthesis is the fusion of two opposites into a third higher entity which supersedes the earlier stages of development. Where is that higher third in our renaissance, and why was synthesis so often necessary? What real synthesis is possible between abstract ideals like the fight for social reform and defence of traditional custom, secular human rights and Hindu superiority, reason and faith? One could but choose, in specific issue after issue, if not always for one's whole life.

It may be suggested that the correct concept in our case is not synthesis, but the interpenetration of opposites. This has indeed happened again and again. What we encounter in so many minds is compromise, co-existence of logically opposed ideas, eclectic combination of diverse ideals, the clash of opposites.

In reviewing a past conflict, value-judgments cannot be avoided.

The observer cannot bless both sides equally in a historic confrontation. Both trends in the renaissance in Bengal reflected objective reality and contributed to development. But one can certainly be preferred, and here the criterion must be the greater appropriateness and relevance to future progress. Of course the observer's choice is largely shaped by his own outlook, and 'bias' in such choice is always present. Many, however, remain sublimely unaware of their own bias in their crusade against 'partisanship' for 'objective truth'.

It appears to me that Westernism was the more progressive trend in 19th century Bengal. Historically, our 'awakening' itself was through the attraction of the new, "the magic touch" as Tagore once described it. The future India of the dreams of very many of us — the 'Maha-Bharat' of Tagore again — is certainly kindred to the Westernist liberal modernism. Even socialism is but the natural outcome of that. The vital thing in the concept of a Nation is not so much past memories as future aspirations.

Westernism has a greater appropriateness and relevance in the task of building up the Indian Nation, for logically it implies the rights of man as man in the secular sense; its rationalism undermines change-resisting religious and social orthodoxy; its social reform holds out the prospect of emancipation for the oppressed. Its potentiality has by no means been exhausted, and is capable of being extended to fresh fields beyond the range of the 19th century vision.

The inherent weakness of Traditionalism, from this point of view, can be detected in embryo even in our Political Extremism. This contributed to an immediate popularity, but the price had to be paid in the future. A legacy was left to hinder the building up of a new united India.

Indeed the historic conflict of the 19th century has persisted to our own days, and again and again the choice has still to be made.

## *Religious Thought of Rammohun Roy*

THE PURPOSE of this essay is an analysis of the religious thinking of Rammohun Roy, indubitably a landmark in the cultural history of modern Bengal. For considerations of space at least two important connected problems have to be left out — Rammohun's relation to earlier theistic speculations and contemporary popular religious practices on the one hand, and on the other his impact on his followers and the moral intellectual life of his country in general.

The material for this article is drawn entirely from Rammohun's English works. He wrote extensively in Bengali, shaping his own language into a vehicle of serious prose. But it was also his practice to supply his own English versions for a wider public as he went ahead. These constitute a veritable treasury of rich thought with which we are not familiar today. They deserve extensive quotation for their wealth of reflection, close argument and felicity in expression.

### FIRST FORMULATIONS

The first significant religious pronouncement of Rammohun Roy was in the *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin* (c. 1804), with a Persian text and an Arabic introduction. An English translation (by a Muslim scholar) appeared only in 1884. In this pamphlet, Rammohun appears as a pure deist and a rationalist with a certain limitation.

The introduction begins with the assertion that there is a universal belief in "the existence of one being who is the source of creation and the governor of it", but there is no agreement between particular religious creeds. The former is indeed like "a natural tendency", while a creed is only "an excrescent quality grown . . . by habit and training." It is logically impossible for the conflicting creeds to be all true. Imputing truth to one of them will be a case of "giving preference without there being any reason for it". Hence the conclusion must be drawn that "falsehood is common to all religions."

^ The text of the booklet is a frontal attack on all sectarians. To the simple natural faith in the existence of a supreme being have been added "hundreds of useless hardships and privations regarding eating and drinking, purity and impurity, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, etc." which are merely "causes of injury and detrimental to social life." Again, "everyone in imitation of the individuals of the nation among whom he has been brought up professes the existence of a particular divinity." Mujtahids (religious expounders) "invent" dogmas of faith; support these by supernatural theories "which are full of impossibilities"; advance apparently reasonable arguments "which are evidently nonsensical and absurd." "None of them can refute the dogmas of others in this life . . . all of them are living here equally enjoying the external blessings of nature."

^ Sectarian arguments are knocked out one by one. It has been claimed that miracles are possible for the almighty. But the creator will certainly not "create impossible things"; why should we believe in things which are "inconsistent with the laws of perception?" It has been insinuated that even if a religion is false, there can be no harm in believing in it. But what is "remote from reason and repugnant to experience" is unworthy of a sensible man; it is even likely to promote mischiefs and immoral practices. It is believed that the rejection of traditional religion is an "insult of our forefathers". But man, not being an animal, "should exercise his own intellectual powers" given by god himself. It is held that one should not go against the faith of his community. But the appeal to majority is "a blow to all . . . religion", for every religion is a minority at first.

In the pages of the *Tuhfat*, Rammohun's deism shines out brightly, shorn of all sectarian beliefs, with a constant appeal to reason, man's "innate faculty". But the rationalism of course is not unqualified. The universality of belief in one being is no certain proof of its truth; Rammohun himself in another context admitted that "the truth of a saying does not depend on the multiplicity of the sayers." He also remarked that the belief in the existence of the soul and the next world ("the foundation of religions") is "for the sake of the welfare of the people", "although the real existence of soul and the next world is hidden and mysterious". He did not dwell on the theory of creation out of nothing. What he emphasised is the natural belief in "the one being who is the fountain of the harmonious organisation of the universe" — the familiar argument of pattern. Basically this is faith rather than reason. The acute criticism of Hume against theism itself,

for example in the dialogue between Cleanthes and Philo, which Rammohun's younger contemporary Derozio taught his students at the Hindu College, would have left Rammohun cold.

It is significant that Rammohun did not bring out an English version of the *Tuhfat*. Was the early rationalism too much for his audience and himself? The Brahmo Samaj has also not used it overmuch. Miss Collet considered it immature, though Brajendranath Seal thought otherwise.

#### NATURE OF THE SUPREME BEING

Men have a natural belief in a supreme being who however cannot be exactly defined. He is "out of the reach of comprehension and beyond all description." (*Ishopanishad*, Preface.) "No language can describe him, no intellectual powers can compass or determine him. We know nothing of how the Supreme Being should be explained." (*Kena Upanishad*.) He is "the eternal unsearchable immutable being who is the author and preserver of the universe." (*Trust Deed of Brahmo Samaj*.)

The unknowability of god is not carried by Rammohun to the pure logic of agnosticism. Our ignorance of the nature of the supreme being, he argues in the *A Second Defence of Monotheistic System*, does not mean that we are equally ignorant as to his existence. "Many things that far surpass the limits of our senses to perceive, or experience to teach, may yet be rendered credible, or even demonstrated by inferences drawn from our experiences." (*Ibid.*), as in the case of gravitation. In the *Religious Instructions* he remarks that when we hold god to be imperceptible and undefinable, we mean "his likeness cannot be conceived"; and when we state that he is capable of being known, "his mere existence is referred to, that there is a god, as the indescribable creation and government of this universe clearly demonstrate". We acquire a notion of the superintending power solely through "observation of material phenomena." (*Tract on the Divine Worship*.) The knowledge of god in an exact sense is "difficult, or rather impossible"; "but to read the existence of the almighty being in his works of nature, is not, I will dare to say, so difficult to the mind of a man possessed of commonsense, and unfettered by prejudice." (*A Defence of Hindu Theism*.)

In the *Tuhfat*, verses and phrases from the Koran were quoted, though only in passing. Twelve years later, Rammohun found a firm footing in the Hindu Vedanta with Sankara's interpretation, in the

light of his own understanding of course. In the introduction to the *Hindu Theism* he declared "the doctrines of the unity of god are real Hindooism, as that religion was practised by our ancestors." In the *Abridgement of Vedanta* he quoted Vyasa, who "explained the supreme being by his effects and works, without attempting to define his essence", as we explain the sun by its consequences. From "the multifarious, wonderful universe", "we naturally infer the existence of a being, who regulates the whole", as from a pot we infer the artificer.

The argument from pattern is of course open to serious logical scientific criticism. But Rammohun stuck firmly to it. Atoms etc. cannot be the independent cause of the world; "no being void of understanding can be the author of a system so skilfully arranged." (*Ibid.*) The wonderful structure and growth of even so trifling an object as a leaf of tree affords proof of a superintending power. (*Monotheistical System.*) "Body is as infinite as space . . . the power that guides its members must be internal." (*Divine Worship.*) "The regular, wise and wonderful combinations and arrangements" of surrounding objects "lead an unbiased mind to a notion of a supreme existence." (*Collected Translations*, Introduction.)

From the first step asserting god's existence, it is not difficult to arrive at certain formulations about the nature of the supreme being, in spite of the proclamation of its unknowability. "God is indeed one and has no second." (*Abridgement of Vedanta.*) "The sole regulator of the universe is but one, who is omnipresent." (*Ishopanishad*, Preface.) "As the universe is infinite in extent, and is arranged with infinite skill, the soul by which it is animated must be infinite in every perfection." (*Divine Worship.*) Nature is "subordinate to and dependent on the perceiving spirit." (*The Brahmanical Magazine*, 1.) It is however admitted that attributes held excellent among men, "as truth, mercy, justice, etc." are often ascribed to god as an adaptation to "the understanding of beginners in the study of theology." (*Ibid.*, IV.) Rammohun did not cling to strictest monism, or to an unqualified doctrine of unknowability of the godhead.

#### FIGHT AGAINST IDOLATRY

Rammohun's views on the nature of the supreme being are not unacceptable to other religions. What marked him out was rather his uncompromising rejection of idol-worship in any form. He did not confine himself to an abstract intellectual philosophy, but declared war



on popular religious practices and ritual.) It was this which earned for him the hostility of his countrymen, bitterness and persecution. But he was not a man to shrink from his chosen path of duty.

✓ Categorically he asserted that in worship “all that bear figure and appellation are inventions.” (*Ishopanishad*, Preface.) He quoted from the *Brihadaranyaka* — “adore god alone”. By admitting other divinities the positive Vedic teachings “become false and absurd.” (*Abridgement of Vedanta*.) He denied that ceremonies and rites are necessary to true religion. (*Hindu Theism*.) “There can obviously be no inducement for an omnipotent being . . . to assume a form”; any representation of him is “impossible for a man, who has a becoming idea of god’s superiority.” (*Monotheistical System*.)

✓ The worship of figured beings indicated in the sastras “is only applicable to those who are incapable of elevating their minds”, “for the benefit of those who are not possessed of sufficient understanding.” (*Ishopanishad*, Preface.) Such sastric injunctions are “merely a concession to the limited faculties; and not meant for ‘a wise man’.” (*Monotheistic System*.) Recourse to visible objects for worship is a “puerile practice.” (*Hindu Theism*.) Only “complete fools” believe in the beneficial necessity of rites and sacrifices (*Mundaka Upanishad*); “a fool . . . accepts the offer of rites.” (*Kathopanishad*.) Other uncomplimentary terms follow — idol-worship is meant for “persons of mean capacity”; (*Collected Translations*, Introduction;) “persons of feeble intellect”, “weak and ignorant persons”; (*The Brahmanical Magazine*, II;) “those (for example, idiots) who are unfortunately incapable of adoring the invisible supreme being.” (*Ibid.*, IV.) No wonder that people were furious with Rammohun. Sensibilities were naturally hurt; but equally naturally the religious reformer who would not limit himself to academic speculation could not keep quiet.

✓ Rammohun however admitted that idol-worship “is not absolutely useless”; (*Different Modes of Worship*;) it is preferable to allowing people sinking to sheer idleness and sloth. (*The Brahmanical Magazine*, IV.) But he had no patience with the sophisticated defence of the worship of images. One by one he demolished the varieties of such intellectual defence for practices intrinsically unworthy of men; his Preface to the *Ishopanishad* concentrated on this task.)

If it is argued that to attain a knowledge of the supreme being is impossible, why did the sastras instruct mankind “to aim at such attainment”? If it is held that the acquisition of the knowledge of god is difficult, “we ought therefore the more exert ourselves to acquire:

that knowledge." To the argument that the worship of one god is for yatis or ascetics alone, Rammohun quoted Yajnavalkya that a householder also is required to perform such worship. Well-meaning Europeans have argued that idols are mere instruments to elevate our minds to god; Rammohun retorted that in actual fact the Hindus believe in the "independent existence of the objects of their idolatry as deities", ascribing to them particular locations and modes of life, endowing an image with animation through the ceremony of the "pranapratishta". It is said that all existence is god, and since the worship of everything is impossible, there can be no harm in adoring selected existences; Rammohun's reply is that in worshipping a few things, the omnipresent divinity is not recognised, and after all god is "quite different from what we see or feel." To the claim that the idol-worship purifies the mind, the answer is that purity of mind cannot be the consequence of any superstitious practice. The justification by long custom is met with the formulation that custom, "the fruit of vulgar caprice", is quite different from true faith, based on "spiritual authorities and correct reasoning"; moreover, custom is variable, people recently have repeatedly turned to new practices "to promote their worldly advantage." The *Hindu Theism* also pointed out that Hindus worship their deities not as "ministers" of god, but as "independent gods", each claiming worship "on his own account". Idol-worship, permitted only to the ignorant, has in effect led to a total neglect of the one god. (*Monotheistical System*.)

Idolatry is no mere intellectual error, it carries with it evil consequences. Rammohun quoted from the Kularnava in his *Monotheistical System*: "those who believe that the divine nature exists in any image . . . reap only distress by their austerities." "Idolatrous rites can never be productive of eternal beatitude" — being meant only for the unperceptive. (*Mundaka Upanishad*, Introduction.) Human proneness to idol-worship promotes "vain fancies"; that is why precautions must be taken against "framing a deity after human imagination." (*Collected Translations*, Introduction.) Otherwise, we are landed in absurdities which have "destroyed every mark of reason, and darkened every beam of understanding." (*Kena Upanishad*, Introduction.)

✓ More mundane evils have also flowed in consequence of the slackening of true religion under the stress of image-worship. The *Monotheistical System* in a passage listed some of the evils resulting from the turning away from higher Vedantic teaching — forcible widow-burning; sale of girls in marriage; polygamy; kulinism. The caste system

also is connected with the decay.) It is a source of disunity; (*The Brahmanical Magazine*, I;) it has deprived the Hindus of "patriotic feeling". (Private letter of 18 January 1828.) Rammohun thought that our social evils reflect the results of our loss of grip over higher religion. Ceremonies "instituted under the pretext of honouring the all-perfect author of nature are of a tendency utterly subversive of every moral principle." (*Hindu Theism*.) If we begin to slip from the correct path we tend to slide down.

The main responsibility for this sorry state of things is by Rammohun placed squarely on the priesthood. Indeed it was here that he came nearest to the Lutheran reformation. The indictment is severe enough. "Many learned Brahmans are perfectly aware of the absurdity of idolatry . . . But as in the rites, ceremonies and festivals of idolatry, they find the source of their comforts and fortune, they not only never fail to protect idol-worship from all attack, but even advance and encourage it." Again, the Brahmans "concealing your scriptures from you, continually teach you thus — believe whatever we may say — don't examine or even touch your scriptures, neglect entirely your reasoning faculties . . . propitiate us by sacrificing to us the greater part (if not the whole) of your property." (*Ishopanishad*, Preface.) "The Brahmans permitting themselves alone to interpret . . . the Vedanta", it is "little known to the public; and the practice of few Hindoos indeed bears the least accordance with its precepts." And, the Brahmans are people "whose prejudices are strong, and whose temporal advantage depends upon the present system." (*Abridgement of Vedanta*, Introduction.) The Brahmanical teachers are actuated by "selfishness", and "deriving pecuniary and other advantages from the numerous rites and festivals of idol-worship, constantly advance and encourage idolatry." (*Hindu Theism*, Introduction.) "The system of *dreaming*, recommended by the learned Brahman, however essential to the interests of himself and his caste", can bring no advantage. (*Monotheistical System*.) And finally, "the self-interested motives of their pretended guides have rendered the generality of the Hindoo community (in defiance of their sacred books) devoted to idol-worship — the source of prejudice and superstition and of the total destruction of moral principle." (*Mundaka Upanishad*, Introduction.)

The Reformation is also recalled by Rammohun's spirited defence of vernacular versions of holy books, blocked by the priests. "I have not yet met with any text of any Puranas which prohibit the explanation of the scripture in vulgar tongue." (*Hindu Theism*, Introduction.)

Behind Rammohun's militant anger against idolatry, there was a compassion for his countrymen which wins the heart. "A feeling for the misery and distress of his fellow creatures is, to everyone not overpowered by selfish motives, I presume, rather natural than optional. Secondly, I, as one of their countrymen, and ranked in the most religious sect, of course participate in the disgrace and ridicule to which they have subjected themselves." (*Monotheistical System*.) "I born a Brahman have exposed myself to the complaining and reproaches even of some of my relations." (*Abridgement of Vedanta*, Introduction.) "I have never ceased to contemplate with the strongest feelings of regret, the obstinate adherence of my countrymen to the fatal system of idolatry." (*Ishopanishad*, Introduction.) Rammohun was not a missionary from outside; he spoke to his own countrymen as one of themselves. They however did not reciprocate his sentiment.

#### TRUE WORSHIP

Theological speculation was nothing new in our country, nor was intellectual dissent a novelty. What characterises Rammohun was his attempt, in addition, to devise a pure form of divine worship negating all kinds of popular image-worship and ceremonial. Monotheistical cults or sects had also appeared before in plenty. They were however rooted "in the emotion of bhakti" and not drawn straight from philosophical analysis. The true worship promulgated by Rammohun has therefore a ring of modernity in it and it may not be fanciful to trace in it a stamp of westernism. There is in his religious stand a distinctive effort to eliminate the traditional gulf between lofty speculation for the elite and the unthinking rites for the multitude.

Step by step we find unfolding Rammohun's scheme of offering prayers directly to the one god. "The sole regulator of the universe is but one . . . whose worship is the chief duty of mankind." (*Ishopanishad*, Preface.) Man shall direct his worship to the god "who, by residing in the heart, dwells in all living creatures." (*Different Modes of Worship*), "but not under or by any other name." (*Trust Deed*.)

"There is no need to attend to ceremonies prescribed by sastras — no want of a fan should be felt, when a soft southern wind is found to refresh." (*Ishopanishad*, Preface.) "Man may acquire the true knowledge of god, even without absorbing the rules and rites prescribed by the Veda." (*Hindu Theism*, Introduction.) "The illustrious Sankaracharya declared . . . the adoration of the supreme being, to be

entirely independent of Brahmanical ceremonies.” ( *Monotheistical System*.) “The great Vyasa . . . justifies the attainment of the knowledge of god, even by those who never practise the prescribed duties and rites.” ( *An Apology for the Pursuit of Final Beatitude*.)

Positively the essence of the new worship was the attempt to approach god directly, for “he who seeks to obtain a knowledge of god is gifted with it, god rendering himself conspicuous to him.” ( *Mundaka Upanishad*.) The actual mode of worship is thus defined: “To god we should approach, of him we should hear, of him we should think, and to him we should attempt to approximate.” ( *Abridgement of Vedanta*.) “Worship implies the act of one with a view to please another; but when applied to the supreme being, it signifies a contemplation of his attributes.” ( *Religious Instruction*.) The *Trust Deed* defines the process thus: “promotion of the contemplation of the author and preserver of the universe.” To the perhaps natural objection that what cannot be conceived cannot be worshipped, the reply is given: “But should adoration imply only the elevation of the mind to the conviction of the existence of the omnipresent deity . . . and continual contemplation of his power . . . together with a constant sense of the gratitude which we naturally owe him for our existence, sensation, and comfort . . . I will never hesitate to assert, that his adoration is not only possible, and practicable, but even incumbent upon every rational creature.” ( *Monotheistical System*.) Brahma prayers even today try to follow this pattern, faithfully on the whole, though imagination is often allowed to go far beyond the formula.

Adoration has its consequences. “A command over our passions and over the external senses of the body and good acts are . . . indispensable in the mind’s approximation to god.” ( *Abridgement of Vedanta*.) “Moral principle is a part of the adoration of god . . . and good acts are . . . indispensable in the mind’s approximation to god.” ( *Monotheistical System*.) “The true system of religion . . . leads its observers to a knowledge and love of god, and to a friendly indication towards their fellow creatures, impressing their hearts at the same time with humility and charity, accompanied by independence of mind and pure sincerity.” ( *Kathopanishad*, Introduction.) The *Trust Deed* refers to “promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue and the strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religions, persuasions and creeds.” *The Brahmanical Magazine*, IV, notes — “the divine homage, which we offer, consists solely in the practice of daya or benevolence towards each other, and not in a fanciful faith or in

certain motions of the feet, legs, arms, heads, tongue, or other bodily organs.”

Rammohun's mode of worship has two marks of possible westernism, congregational prayers and hymn singing. His long association with the unitarians must have developed the cogregation idea which from the first marked Brahmo meetings. The introduction of monotheistic songs was defended in the *Hindu Theism* (Introduction) on the authority of Yajnavalkya and the comment added: “it is essential that any interesting idea is calculated to make more impression upon the mind, when conveyed in musical verses, than when delivered in the form of common conversation.” Incidentally, hymns have made Brahmo prayers so attractive, opening up a world of beauty and imagination, if not hard truth, which have been carried to such heights in the devotional songs of Tagore.

The pivot of Rammohun's worship was the ancient formula “om-tat-sat” — which implies that “the object contemplated by om can be described only as ‘that’ which ‘is existing’,” (*Divine Worship*.) This existence itself may be a matter of rational debate; how far from this existence one can reasonably travel to the other attributes of god will remain a matter of controversy. In the standard mantra prefacing every Brahmo invocation or aradhana of god, ten terms are used, of which four (the existence, understanding, eternity, oneness) are the very essence of Rammohun's conception, four are at best derivative, while two seem redundant.

#### DOCTRINES OF THE SOUL, SIN, AFTERLIFE

Doctrines about the nature of the soul, sin and virtue, afterlife, interrelated as they are, constitute a ticklish problem for any religion. The concept of the soul and its survival after death is of course a solace in this vale of misery; that of sin and virtue with their consequences are hold to be the cement of society. Yet such concepts do not flow with automatic logic even out of the acceptance of the idea of god's existence. The logical difficulties involved can be ruled out by absolute monism, but absolute monism is a negation of any religious practice. It may dole out intellectual satisfaction to the thinker, handing over worship to the tender mercies of the priesthood and vulgar minds.

About the soul, Rammohun remarked in the *Kathopanishad*: “Various opinions are held by *contending parties*. When the subject

is explained by a person who believes the soul to emanate from god, doubts in regard to its eternity cease . . . A wise man knowing the resplendent soul, through a mind abstracted from worldly objects, and constantly applied to it, neither rejoices nor does he grieve . . . The soul is not liable to birth nor to death; it is mere understanding . . . it is unborn, eternal . . . the soul is not injured by the hurt which the body may receive . . . It resides in the hearts of all living creatures. . . . No man can acquire a knowledge of the soul without abstention from evil acts . . . but . . . through his knowledge of god . . . acquire knowledge of god, the origin of the soul." From the *Kena Upanishad*: the supreme being is "the soul of the universe; and bears the same relation to all material extensions that a human soul does to the individual body with which it is connected." In *The Brahmanical Magazine*, I, we are told that individual souls are, "as it were, the reflection of the supreme being on matter", bright or dull according to the nature of the matter concerned; "souls appear different like candle flames", liable to be "absorbed into universal heat of god"; the soul, being, "an interior agent" or a "partial resemblance", cannot be independent of or equal to god.

Rammohun's defence of the concept of the soul runs thus: "If the individual soul does not proceed from god, is it created out of nothing? That would set aside reason and inference, and in that case there remains no means to prove the existence of god . . . It would strengthen atheistical tenets and destroy all religion." (*Ibid.*) Intrinsically as a religious man, Rammohun naturally rules atheism out of court without arguing about it.

About the nature of sin, Rammohun is brief enough. His system defines sin as evil thoughts proceeding from the heart. quite unconnected with "observances as to diet and other matters of form." (*Kathopanishad*, Introduction.) In the internal struggle between this "desire of indulgence" and the "social inclination", the means of ultimate victory over the former is "sincere repentance and solemn meditation, which occasion mental disquiet and anxiety forming the punishment of sin . . . The sin which mankind contracts against god, by the practice of wickedness, is believed by us to be expiated by those penances." (*The Brahmanical Magazine*, IV.)

Sin carries consequences. The individual soul is "rewarded or punished according to its good or evil actions." (*Kathopanishad*.) "The soul so pressed down in the body, being deluded with ignorance, grieves at its own insufficiency; but when it perceives its cohabitant,

the adorable lord of the universe . . . it feels relieved from grief and infatuation . . . A wise man knowing god as perspicuously residing in all creatures forsakes all idea of duality; *being conceived that there is only one real existence, which is god.*" (*Mundaka Upanishad.*) The soul originates from god but is liable for "the consequences of good and evil works" leading to "reward or punishment." (*The Brahmanical Magazine*, I.)

The consequences occur in life and after death, for only atheists argue that there is no future state. Rammohun defended the sastric teaching (*Ibid.*, II.) without his usual appeal to reasoning however. The consequences of good or evil works are "experienced even in this world", or "god after death inflicts the consequences of the sins or holiness of some in hell or heaven", even to the length of "giving them other bodies animate or inanimate." This is indeed sliding down far from Rammohun's own rationalism in the *Tuhfat*. This opens the door to transmigration and karmaphala, ignoring the obvious objection that reward or punishment after death loses its rational force when no memory is carried of the antecedent act which is its cause. It is worth recalling however the formulation: "The Vedanta does not confine the reward or punishment of good or evil works to the state after death, much less to a particular day of judgment." (*Ibid.*, IV.)

Rammohun firmly believed that contemplation and knowledge of the supreme being were the way out of the network of punishment. That escape is integral to the concept of beatitude. "A knowledge of the supreme spirit is alone the cause of beatitude." (*Monotheistical System.*) "A true knowledge respecting god is the only way to eternal beatitude." (*Mundaka Upanishad.*) Eternal beatitude is allotted to the wise man in god; "when all the desires settled in the heart leave man, the mortal then becomes immortal, and acquire absorption even in this life." (*Kathopanishad.*) Men, acquiring knowledge of god, "after their departure from this world are absorbed into the supreme being." (*Kena Upanishad.*) Incidentally, popular notions of individual personal life after death do not figure in Rammohun's writings.

#### CRUSADE AGAINST CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY

Rammohun was drawn into polemics on Christianity almost by accident. In 1820 he published his *Precepts of Jesus*, proclaiming that the Christian notion of a supreme superintending power and the law that man should do unto others as he would wish to be done by



tend to render our existence agreeable and profitable. The moral doctrines of Jesus, conducive to peace and harmony, "are beyond the reach of metaphysical perversion, and intelligible alike to the learned and the unlearned." Orthodox Christians were roused to fury, naturally as the divinity of Christ was implicitly denied, and attacks poured upon Rammohun.

Rammohun in his reply indicated the Christian missionaries in India. "In Bengal where the English are the sole rulers, and where the mere name of Englishman is sufficient to frighten people, an encroachment upon the rights of her poor timid and humble inhabitants and upon their religion cannot be viewed in the eyes of god or the public as a justifiable act." Again: "to introduce a religion by means of abuse and insult, or by affording the hope of worldly gain, is inconsistent with reason and justice." (*The Brahmanical Magazine*, I.) The missionaries ignore the higher Hindu teaching and ridicule the idolatry; yet do they not endow "Jesus Christ, the very god", with external impressions and sensations? (*Ibid.*, II.) In the *Humble Suggestions* however he added that we should not be angry with the missionaries, but rather feel "compassion" for the blindness of their errors, as it is almost impossible "for men, when possessed of wealth and power, to perceive their own defects."

Rammohun pointed out these "errors" in his assault on trinitarianism, the heart of orthodox Christianity. Is the Christian god a proper noun or a common noun with three numbers? The concept of the trinity is "so palpably contrary to reason and experience." Christians are "biased in favour of the doctrine" because of the impression of early education. Christianity in India is trying to substitute "one set of polytheistical sentiments" for another, both of them protected only by a "shield of mystery". If the omnipotence and omniscience of one of the three is sufficient, "the omnipotence and omniscience of the second and the third is superfluous and absurd; but if not sufficient, why should we stop at the number three?" Moderate commonsense unperturbed by early prejudice enables any one "to tear off the parti-coloured veil of sophistry from the face of this creed . . . contradictory to common sense and opposed to the evidence of the senses." The quotations are from *The Brahmanical Magazine*, III and IV.

The plea that the revealed Bible is the authority for the doctrine meets with the retort: "Can any book which contains an idea that defers the use of the senses be considered worthy to be ascribed to that being who has endowed the human race with senses?" (*Ibid.*, III.)

Yet Rammohun did not lack in respect for the Christian faith. In a letter to Ware (1824) he said: "Christianity, if properly inculcated, has a greater tendency to improve the moral, social and political state of mankind than any other known religious system."

And he was on intimate terms with the unitarian Christians of Bengal and in friendly touch with unitarians abroad. In his *Answer of a Hindu*, he justified his attendance at unitarian services (before his own Brahma Samaj had arisen) for many reasons including — the unitarian inculcation of the doctrine of divine unity, acceptable to the Vedas also; the rejection of polytheism and idolatry, even in all sophistical modification; the denial of allegories, Brahmanical and trinitarian alike; and the turning down of the idea of "man-god" fostered alike by the Brahmans and "another body of priests better dressed, better provided for and eminently elevated by virtue of conquest."

#### TRADITION AND REASON

In his Introduction to the *Kena Upanishad*, Rammohun thus defined his position: "When we look to the traditions of ancient nations, we often find them at variance with each other; and when . . . we appeal to reason as a surer guide, we soon find how incompetent it is, alone, to conduct us to the object of our pursuit . . . it only serves to generate a universal doubt, incompatible with principles on which our comfort and happiness mainly depend. The best method perhaps is neither to give ourselves up to the guidance of the one or the other; but by a proper use of the lights furnished by both, endeavour to improve our intellectual and moral faculties." The balancing was doubtless difficult; but perhaps the very modern concept of "comfort and happiness" came in handy as an aid in the quest.

The traditional respect for the Vedas which Rammohun felt may be illustrated by certain references. In the *Abridgement of Vedanta* he mentions that the Veda itself stated that it was "created by the supreme being". In the *Monotheistical System* he declared that "I never advanced on religious controversy any argument which was not founded upon the authorities of the Vedas and their celebrated commentators." In *The Brahmanical Magazine*, IV, he went even further and talked of "the inspired Vedas", "the divine guidance of the Vedas and the dictates of pure reason"; he added, "the Veda is the law of god revealed and introduced for our rule and guidance." It is however possible that such characterisation of the Veda was rendered neces-

sary to gain an audience for his debates, just as the abstention from open defiance of caste rules and the veneration showed to the Vedas in the first Brahmo prayers might have risen from mixed motives — the line of least resistance as well as the traditions of the people.

Certainly Rammohun's appeal to reason is more frequent. The *Monotheistical System* roundly declares that a "rational being" cannot make use of objects to bring god to his "recollection". If passages of the Veda, seemingly at variance with each other (the unity of god and the plurality of gods), are not allowed to be reconciled by our reasoning, "the whole work must, I am afraid, not only be stripped of its authority, but be looked upon as altogether unintelligible." (*Kena Upanishad*.) We acquire a notion of god through "observation of natural phenomena"; if we reject this "medium of conviction" and force upon us "a belief of the production of matter from nothing, and of its liability to entire annihilation", then nothing will remain in reasoning to justify a notion of god. (*Divine Worship*.) Reasoning must be allowed to reconcile contradictory passages in the Vedas, otherwise the Veda must "necessarily be supposed to be inconsistent with itself, and therefore altogether unintelligible." (*Abridgement of Vedanta*.)

If we withhold confidence from traditions of sacred texts, for the mere possibility of errors in translation, our belief must be shaken in all information about foreign history and theology. (*Hindu Theism*.) But, "As long as men have the use of their senses and faculties . . . they never can be expected to be deluded by any circumlocations founded upon circumstances not only beyond understanding but also contrary to experience and to the evidence of the senses." (*The Brahmanical Magazine*, III.) "A man will find it very hard, if not utterly impossible, to believe what is diametrically opposite to his senses, to his experience, to the uniform course of nature, and to the first axioms of reason." (*Ibid.*, IV.) Again: "if we set out on this irrational career, where are we to stop? May we not from the example set in theology lay aside the use of reason in other sciences also and thereby impede the progress of knowledge and introduce incalculable evils into this world?" (*Ibid.*, IV.) "A thing is justly denied when found contrary to sense and reason." (*Monotheistical System*.)

Commonsense also is repeatedly invoked, for example, in *Ishopanishad* (Preface); in the *Abridgement of Vedanta* (both Introduction and Text); in the *Hindu Theism*. "Truth and true religion do not always belong to wealth and power, high names, or lofty palaces." (*The Brahmanical Magazine*, I.)

Even more remarkable is the use by Rammohun of the very modern concepts of social comfort, compassion and social texture in religious thinking. "My constant reflections on the inconvenient, or rather injurious rites introduced by the peculiar practice of Hindoo idolatry, which . . . destroys the texture of society, together with compassion for my countrymen, have compelled me the use every possible effort to awaken them." (*Abridgement of Vedanta*.) He stated his aim to be to correct those exceptional practices, "which not only deprive Hindoos in general of the common comforts of society, but also lead them frequently to self-destruction." (*Kena Upanishad*, Introduction.) "Idolatry . . . must also be looked upon with great horror . . . as leading directly to immorality and destructive of social comforts." Also, "a sense of the duty which one man owes to another compels me to exert my utmost endeavours to rescue them from imposition and servitude, and promote their comfort and happiness." (*Monotheistical System*.) "The advocates of idolatry . . . practise a system which destroys, to the utmost degree, the natural texture of society." (*Kathopanishad*, Introduction.) "The Vedas, coinciding with the natural desires of social intercourse . . . require of men to moderate those appetites and regulate those passions, in a manner calculated to preserve the peace and comfort of society, and secure their future happiness." (*The Brahmanical Magazine*, IV.)

In this collectivist approach, Rammohun's religion undoubtedly links up with his dreams of a new Bengal with intellectual, social, economic, and even political reforms. It ushers in a modern age in our country however limited its own direct circle might have been.

A chronological list of Rammohun's English writings on religion used in this essay is appended below:

- 1816 — *Abridgement of the Vedanta*
- 1816 — *Translation of the Ishopanishad*
- 1816 — *Translation of the Kena Upanishad*
- 1817 — *A Defence of Hindu Theism*
- 1817 — *A Second Defence of the Monotheistical System*
- 1819 — *Translation of the Mundaka Upanishad*
- 1819 — *Translation of the Kathopanishad*
- 1820 — *An Apology for the Pursuit of Final Beatitude*
- 1820 — *The Precepts of Jesus*
- 1821 — *The Brahmanical Magazine*, Nos. I, II, III.
- 1823 — *The Brahmanical Magazine*, No. IV
- 1823 — *Humble Suggestions*

- 1825 — *Different Modes of Worship*
- 1827 — *Tract on the Divine Worship*
- 1827 — *Answer of a Hindu*
- 1828 — *Trust Deed of the Brahmo Samaj*
- 1829 — *Religious Instructions*
- 1832 — *Collected Translations.*

## *Economic Thought of Rammohun Roy*

THE EVIDENCE submitted by Rammohun Roy in connection with the discussions leading to the revision of the East India Company's Charter in 1833 is, of course, not unknown to students of history and has been utilised by scholars\*. Yet the full text is not easily available though it is worthy of a minute study. Its importance is two-fold. Firstly, it is a succinct, admirable and trustworthy contemporary record written by one who is at home with his subject, so that every sentence conveys a sense of assurance and a commendable width of vision. Secondly, the testimony throws light on the outlook of Rammohun himself, an attitude to which justice has not been done even by some of our most eminent historians.

The material discussed consists of (i) preliminary remarks of Rammohun Roy; (ii) Rammohun's answers to 54 questions on the revenue system of India; (iii) his paper in 27 paragraphs on the same subject (both dated 19 August 1831); (iv) his answers to 78 questions on the judicial system of India (19 September 1831); (v) the reply (28 September 1831) to 13 additional queries respecting the conditions of India; (vi) an exposition of the practical operation of the judicial and revenue systems, in the form of explanatory notes on the evidence submitted to the authorities; (vii) the answers (19 March 1832) to 12 queries on the salt monopoly; and (viii) remarks (14th July 1832) on settlement in India by Europeans. The entire text is indeed of absorbing interest. No summary can be adequate to convey the richness of the matter mentioned. It is hoped that the reprint of the entire material in a handy form will be of use to students of economic history.

Rammohun himself came from the landed gentry but greatness in the form of a love for his people shines through the whole evidence. "Under both systems" (permanent and ryotwari) "the condition of

\* Reference may be made to the *English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, Part III, Sadharan Brahmo Samaj edition, 1947.

the cultivators is very miserable; in the one they are placed at the mercy of the zemindar's avarice and ambition, in the other they are subjected to the extortions and intrigues of the surveyors and other government revenue officers. I deeply compassionate both." He demanded that "no further measurements or increase of rent, on any pretence whatsoever, should be allowed", for landlords went on raising the rents of the cultivators "through their local influence and intrigues." His advice was to the effect — "where the rents are very high, reduce the rents payable by the cultivators to the landholders." "I regret to say that the legal protection of the cultivators is not at all such as could be desired." "There is in practice no fixed standard to afford security to the cultivators for the rate or amount of rent demandable from them."

Analysing the effects of the Permanent Settlement, Rammohun had no hesitation in declaring that the condition of the cultivators "has not been improving in any degree", while the condition of the proprietors "has been much improved", as, secured against any higher demand of government revenue, they have brought "wastelands into cultivation, and raised the rents of their tenantry." As for the government, they have "sacrificed nothing in concluding that settlement." The brunt had fallen squarely on the tenants who lived in "overwhelming poverty".) "When grain is abundant and therefore cheap, they are obliged, as already observed, to sell their whole produce to satisfy their landlords"; "in dear years they may be able to retain some portion of the crop to form a part of their subsistence, but by no means enough for the whole." "It is well-known that . . . there are to be found very few, if any, besides proprietors of land, that have the least pretension to wealth or independence, or even the common comforts of life." "I have . . . often observed the poorer classes living on rice and salt only." He added: "such is the melancholy condition of the agricultural labourers, that it always gives me the greatest pain to allude to it."

While in the Permanent Settlement the government liberally relieved the proprietors, Rammohun noted that "I am at a loss to conceive why this indulgence was not extended to their tenants, by requiring proprietors to follow the example of government, in fixing a definite rent to be recovered from each cultivator . . . or why the feeling of compassion, excited by the miserable condition of the cultivators, does not now induce the government to fix a maximum standard . . . and positively interdict any further increases." Here indeed is the crux of the

matter, the nature of early British Indian economic policy has been laid bare by a sure hand. And we see the rationalist in the following passage: "Some, however, doubt whether government can now assume the power of bettering the condition of this immense portion of its subjects, without violating the long-standing practice of the country . . . at least for the last forty years; but I am satisfied that an unjust precedent and practice, even of longer standing, cannot be considered as the standard of justice by an enlightened government."

We have interesting passages on questions of interest: the recognition of some kind of labour (service) rent; the close cooperation between the zemindars and the police; the evident collusion in the auction of defaulting estates; the need to ensure that "the collectors should not by any means be armed with magisterial powers"; the advocacy of colonisation by superior types of Europeans to introduce "superior methods of cultivation"; "the great alarm and distrust amongst the natives" produced by the resumption of rent-free lands by Regulation III of 1828; the desirability of reducing the cost of the revenue establishment; and the urgency of relief. "I must conclude with beseeching any and every authority to devise some mode of alleviating the present miseries of the agricultural peasantry of India."

In connection with judicial administration, Rammohun held that the "first obstacle to the administration of justice is that the administrators, and the persons among whom it is administered, have no common language". "It is not expected that European judges should be generally competent to determine difficult questions of evidence among a people whose language, feelings and habits of thinking and acting are so totally different from their own." He pointed out "the absence of reporters and of a public press, to take notice of the proceedings of the courts in the interior"; "consequently there is no superintendence of public opinion". Thus, "the respectable and intelligent native inhabitants cannot be expected to have confidence in the general operation of the judicial system". "It is necessary to have recourse to trial by jury, as being the only effectual check against corruption", specially since the "principle of juries, under certain modifications, has, from the most remote periods, been well understood in this country, under the name of punchayet." It was also desirable that "judges of the Sudder Dewanee Adawlut should have the power of issuing the writ of habeas corpus." The evidence proceeds to argue in almost a Benthamite fashion for the framing of a "code of criminal law for India" as well as a "code of civil law", based on common acknowledged principles, simple and



precise, not standing in need of explanation by a reference to books of religious authority.

We find also, amidst a variety of comments, a condemnation of sending out to India young civilians who are "placed in a situation calculated to plunge them into many errors, make them overstep the bounds of duty to their fellow creatures and fellow subjects"; also, a suggestion that any project of law, before it is finally adopted, should be circulated for opinion to the responsible sections of the Indian people — "the principal zemindars"; "the highly respectable merchants", the muftis and "the head native officers". The liberal aim of the age is clearly formulated: through increasing association of the Indians with the administration, "the natives may become attached to the present system of government, so that it may become consolidated, and maintain itself by the influence of the intelligent and respectable classes of the inhabitants, and by the general goodwill of the people, and not any longer stand isolated in the midst of its subjects, supporting itself merely by *the exertion of superior force.*" (Italics ours.)

The answers to the additional queries are of a miscellaneous character but illuminating in their own way; the need for a "frequent and common use of a moderate proportion of animal food" in the Indian diet; the assertion that the people of India have "the same capability of improvement as any other civilised people"; a tribute to the secular education established "on a highly respectable and firm footing" at the Hindu College in Calcutta despite Christian objections to a godless education; and the admission that "men of aspiring character . . . are decidedly disaffected" towards the existing form of government, while the beneficiary classes (those "who engage prosperously in commerce"; "those who are secured in the peaceful possession of their estates by the Permanent Settlement"; and "such as have sufficient intelligence to foresee the probability of future improvement which presents itself under the British rule") naturally incline the other way. The mass of the common people, we are told, are "indifferent about either the former or present government".

Rammohun's explanatory notes on the evidence submitted to the authorities in England are worthy of particular notice as they have attracted little attention. Equally remarkable are his views on the salt monopoly involving the distress of the people in consequence and on the controversial question of European settlement in India.

It is good to hear an authentic voice speak out, in such a forthright fashion and with such evident knowledge of the problems of our country, across five generations.

## *David Hare*

DAVID HARE, a Scotsman, devoted the best part of his life, over four decades (1800–42), to the people of Bengal. He was a main architect of the new education, the foundation of our 19th century regeneration and renaissance.

David Hare was born, 17 February 1775, presumably in London where his father was a watchmaker. David's mother came from Aberdeen which he visited to meet her people before coming out to India. It is a mark of his reticence that his Indian friends remained ignorant of the names of his parents.

David had three brothers — Joseph, a businessman, at 48 Bedford Square, London; Alexander (James ?), who came to India and had a daughter, Janet; and John, who visited India also but settled with Joseph, and had a daughter, Rosalind.

At David's request, his family took good care of his friend, Rammohun Roy, in England. Rammohun was persuaded to stay with them for some time; a niece attended his last illness at Stapleton Grove; all the Hares came to the Raja's interment, 18 October 1833.

David himself was a life-long bachelor.

David Hare was a philanthropist, no intellectual scholar, though the intellect of contemporary Scotland must have touched him. He "must have received a good plain education", was well-informed and had read the best authors, with a library of his own. He spoke and wrote effectively, and acquired a smattering of Hindustani and "broken Bengali".

He took up the watch trade in Calcutta (1800), shifting next year from Larkins Lane to the "southwest corner of the church yard" near the street which still bears his name. He transferred (1 January 1820) his successful business to Gray, his assistant and possibly a relative with whom he continued to live in Hare Street till death. David invested his profits in landed property round the present College Square, but generosity drove him to debts; part of the land he sold cheap

to Sanskrit College; another part he gifted to house the Hindu College.

The controversy about the founder of the Hindu College ought to be settled by the *Calcutta Christian Observer*, 1832. It states, on the authority of Derozio, that Hare mooted, at Rammohun's house in 1815, a scheme for a metropolitan education centre, as an "amendment" to the Raja's projected religious society. In Hare's own words later: "I was enabled to discover, during my intercourse with several native gentlemen, that nothing but education was requisite to render the Hindoos happy." It was Hare's plan which was carried "by a native" to Hyde East who convened the foundation meeting on 14 May 1816. Near-contemporaries regarded Hare as the real founder of the great college — Kishorichand Mitra (1862), Rajnarayan Bose (1874, 1876); Pearychand Mitra (1877). Hare also helped drafting of the original college rules.

Hare was associated with the School Book Society of 4 July 1817 for the "cheap or gratuitous supply of useful school books other than religious, in English and oriental languages", contributing Rs. 100 annually.

The School Society of 1 September 1818 was largely sustained by Hare, its European secretary (1823–42), who in 1828 gave it Rs. 6,000. The society helped existing schools and started new free schools, for example at Thanthania (Arpuli) and Champatala (Pataldanga); these two merged by 1834 in Hare School. Hare employed Krishnamohan Banerji and Rasikkrishna Mallik as teachers at Pataldanga, but had to remove the two "firebrands" reluctantly on orthodox pressure. From 1819–20, thirty free scholars were sent up by his schools regularly to the Hindu College where they formed its elite of "ornaments".

Hare devoted his entire day to the schools and the college where he was visitor (1819), inspector (1824), committee member (1825). He befriended the great Derozio, protecting him from the head D'Anselme, standing up for the maligned teacher of Young Bengal at the time of the dismissal (1831).

After Derozio, Hare was the ally of Young Bengal. He was the protector of the Academic Association and patron of the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge (1838). He appeared with the Derozians in public meetings — against press regulations (15 January 1835); for extension of the jury (8 July 1835); against indentured labour (10 July 1835); for cooperation with the British India Society (1839). He rescued "coolies" intended for Mauritius from a Pataldanga house. He participated in the petition for the use of English

in "mofussil" courts (1835) and the agitation for legal reforms (1836).

The Derozians reciprocated Hare's friendship. They (565 young men) were the first to publicly honour Hare, on his 56th birthday; they secured his portrait (now in Hare School) and erected the 1847 memorial statue (in Presidency College now); they organised the Hare Prize Fund and the anniversary meetings after death for 25 years without a break; one of them produced the standard biography.

Hare fully stressed Bengali education in his schools. In the fitness of things, he was asked to lay the foundation (14 June 1839) of the Bengali Pathshala in Hindu College grounds. He subscribed to the Ladies' Society for Native Female Education (1824).

The principal of the epoch-making Calcutta Medical College (1 February 1835) noted: "Without Mr Hare's influence an attempt to form a Hindu Medical class would have been futile." From 1837 to 1841, Hare was its secretary and treasurer, virtually its principal.

Hare was a member of the Agri-Horticultural and Asiatic Societies, a donor to the District Charitable Society.

His financial difficulties due to generosity were eased too late by his appointment (1840) as the third commissioner to the Court of Requests on a salary of Rs. 1,000.

Hare died suddenly of cholera on 1 June 1842. On a rain-sodden inclement day, 5,000 Indians followed his body from the Hare Street residence to the grave in College Square, in his own land appropriately. With a warmth rare indeed in official documents, James Kerr noted in his *Review*: "It was the manifest interest he felt in the work, in the exertions of the masters and in the progress of the students, mixing freely with the latter . . . joining in their amusements . . . giving them advice . . . and assisting them . . . in obtaining situations, that made him so beloved and so useful. He used also, when they were sick, to visit them at their houses, bringing medicine to them . . . even Hindu women would lay aside their reserve and consult him as they would a father or brother."

Hare said himself: "It has always been a rule with me never to bring myself into public notice." But others remembered. Rasikkrishna described his palanquin as a "travelling dispensary". Would-be students ran after it to catch his kindly eye.

Simple in habits, Hare developed Bengali food-tastes. Unostentatious but sociable, he attended Hindu social gatherings. Fond of walking, he covered 28 miles one night.

Rationalism drew him close to Derozio. Common to both was the

conviction that India needed most “a dissemination of European learning and science”. Both encouraged freedom of thinking and personal integrity “to throw off the fetters of that antiquated bigotry which still clung to their countrymen”. Both were beloved of the students whom Hare called “reformers and instructors”. And both were “godless” secularists. Hare was unwilling to admit “half Christians” who “will spoil my boys”; he has even been termed “an atheist”; the *Friend of India* refers to his “inveterate hostility” to organised Christianity; and he was not buried in consecrated ground.

“The Young Bengal Address” (1831) spoke of Hare as “the man who has breathed a new life in Hindu society, who has voluntarily become the friend of a friendless people, and set an example to his own countrymen and ours”. The “Memorial Statue (1847)” adds that Hare “having acquired an ample competence cheerfully relinquished the prospect of returning to enjoy it in his native land in order to promote the welfare of that of his adoption.”

Macaulay observed in 1835: “Of all those who now take an interest in the cause of native education, Mr Hare, we believe, was the first in the field . . . to induce the native inhabitants . . . to cultivate the English language . . . as the most convenient channel through which access was to be obtained to the science of the West.”

One abiding result of Hare’s work was the pure secular education in the college founded by the orthodox but shaped by him. And the Derozian Radhanath Sikdar aptly compared him to “the morning star”.

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## *Derozio and Young Bengal*

THE THOUGHT of young Bengal (Pearychand Mitra, one of the circle, called it in 1877 "Young Calcutta") flowed through the fourth decade of the 19th century, arising in the late twenties and ebbing away after the mid-forties. Its inspirer was Derozio (1809–31), competent scholar, gifted writer, radical thinker and the most famous of our teachers in the new education. It will be unusual to link with Young Bengal a second name, that of David Hare (1775–1842) who seems so different from Derozio in so many ways. Hare was indeed no professional instructor or intellectual, no man of letters or of academic learning. He had neither the brilliance nor the waywardness of his contemporary; unlike him he had become in diet and habits almost a half Hindu. Yet between the two may be detected an underlying resemblance which furnishes a key to a proper estimation of Young Bengal.

Common to both was the passionate conviction that for India nothing was more essential than "a dissemination of European learning and science among her people". Both encouraged freedom of thinking and discussion and inspired a courage and personal integrity in their followers "to throw off the fetters of that antiquated bigotry which still clung to their countrymen". And unlike other leaders around them, both were "godless" secularists with little faith in denominations or religious instruction, and yet staunch idealists. Nor can one forget that, in the hour of trial, Hare tried to stand by Derozio and his maligned pupils about whom he declared: "your countrymen look upon you as their reformers and instructors"; while the Derozians were the first to honour Hare publicly, and after his death they were in the forefront in the endeavour to perpetuate his memory, in the unique first of June anniversaries for 25 years without a break.

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was a Calcutta Eurasian of Portuguese-Indian ancestry, the son of an officer in an English mercantile firm. (In the *Hindu College Records* of 1831, the name is occasionally spelt as De Rozio; Max Muller wrote D. Rozario.) He was educated in

one of the pioneer English-teaching private schools of the early 19th century, run by the Scotsman, Drummond, in the Dharamtala area. Drummond was a scholar poet, and as a notorious free-thinker an exile from his native land. It may safely be conjectured that Derozio derived from Drummond his taste in literature and philosophy, his love of Burns, his faith in the French revolution and English radicalism.

After finishing school and a short spell of clerkship in his father's office, young Derozio stayed for some time at Bhagalpur at the house of his aunt, a Mrs Wilson. Here he blossomed out as a writer, contributing to the *India Gazette*, composing poems (including the *Fakir of Jhungeera*, inspired by local legends). He wrote patriotic verse, unusual in one from his community, earlier than Kashiprasad Ghose:

My country! in thy days of glory past  
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow,  
And worshipped as a deity thou wast,  
Where is that glory, where that reverence now?

Derozio's youthful critique on Kant was considered as something which "would not disgrace even gifted philosophers"; his translation of a French essay on moral philosophy was printed posthumously. The fame already won secured him an appointment as teacher to the senior classes in the Hindu College before he had ended his "tecns", early in 1826 (1827 according to Kishorichand Mitra, 1828 according to Edwardes). Back in Calcutta, Derozio is said to have edited the *Hesperus* and the *Calcutta Literary Gazette*; to have acted as editor-assistant to the *India Gazette*, "ultraradical in its politics"; and to have written for the *Calcutta Magazine*, the *Indian Magazine*, the *Bengal Annual*, the *Kaleidoscope*. One of his poems greeted the liberation of Greece at the battle of Navarino; another hailed the legislative prohibition of widow-burning in India.

Derozio's personality brought "a new era in the annals of the college", the youthful teacher drawing the senior boys "like a magnet" round him. According to his biographer, "neither before, nor since his day has any teacher, within the walls of any native educational establishment in India, ever exercised such an influence over his pupils." Not alone in the classrooms, but outside the hours as well, he strove with success "to broaden and deepen the knowledge of his pupils" in western thought and literature, the new fountain which emancipated and intoxicated. The college students clustered round him and very many of them carried down to their last days the deep impress stamped on them by their master. This was the cementing link which held

together the Young Bengal group, the memory which made a close-knit fellowship of affection and friendship even in later life. Derozio's own approach to the bright young men round him has been preserved in his lines still fondly recalled by his college:

Expanding like the petals of young flowers  
I watch the gentle opening of your minds  
And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds  
Your intellectual energies and powers.

What joyance rains upon me when I see  
Fame in the mirror of futurity  
Weaving the chaplets you have yet to gain.  
And then I feel I have not lived in vain.

Unlike most teachers, Derozio encouraged his students to debate freely and question authority. He urged them to think for themselves; "to be in no way influenced by any of the idols mentioned by Bacon — to live and die for truth." One of his pupils, Radhanath Sikdar, said of him: "He has been the cause and the sole cause of that spirit of inquiry after truth, and that contempt of vice — which cannot but be beneficial to India." Another, Ramgopal Ghose, held up the motto: "He who will not reason is a bigot; he who cannot is a fool; and he who does not is a slave."

Derozio's favourite pupils had a free run of his house in the Entally quarter of the city, and some of them indulged in forbidden food and drink. The tinge of youthful bravado in this should not make us forget the evident sincerity and courage which marked the revolt against tradition in practice, though one may regret that, unlike the young Brahmo rebels of a later generation, some at least of Young Bengal aggressively offended the susceptibility of neighbours by a parade of unkind derision. Hindu society was scandalised beyond measure, understandably, though without any real understanding. The assertion of Madhabchandra Mallik in a college magazine — "if there is anything that we hate from the bottom of our heart, it is Hinduism" — was a defiant ebullition of immature irreverence. But the refusal of another student, Rasikkrishna Mallik, in open court to swear by the holy water — "I do not believe in the sacredness of the Ganges" — was a mark of heroic integrity. The addiction to drink in so many Derozians was a touch of weakness. Yet one cannot forget the contemporary testimony of Haramohan Chatterji of the college office: "They were all considered men of truth. Indeed, the college boy was a synonym for truth."



Derozio and his pupils started in 1828 the Academic Association, our first debating club, which discussed topics like free-will and fate, virtue and vice, patriotism, arguments for or against the existence of god, the shames of idolatry and priestcraft. The long weekly meetings were presided over by Derozio whose exhortations were cherished, while the debating talents of the youthful members attracted attention and drew many celebrities in the city to the exciting sessions. The Hindu College boys started the *Parthenon* magazine (the *Athenium*, according to Sivanath Sastri) on 15 February 1830 wherein were mooted subjects like women's education, necessity of cheap justice, and the curse of superstition. This organ of the "Hindu by birth, yet European by education" was suppressed after two issues by order of the college visitor, H. H. Wilson. By arrangement with David Hare, Derozio delivered a course of lectures on metaphysics in his school "attended by some four hundred young men", many of whom were delving deep in the new thought of Bacon, Locke, Hume, Smith, Paine or Bentham.

In this atmosphere there was surging up a wave of radical sentiment. In the *India Gazette* of 12 February 1830, a Hindu College student argued against the current colonisation scheme by an array of historical precedents from ancient to modern times. On 10 December 1830, 200 persons attended the July revolution celebration in the Town Hall. On Christmas day of the same year, the tri-colour flag of the French revolution was hoisted on the monument, apparently by unknown people.

Orthodox society was deeply alarmed. It was rumoured that some Hindu College boys, when required to utter mantras at prayers, would repeat lines from the Iliad instead; that one student, asked to bow down before the goddess Kali, greeted the image with a "good morning, madam". A poor Brahmin, Brindaban Ghoshal, carried to society leaders the daily gossip, spiced richly with scandal-mongering about Derozio and his pupils. Newspapers like the *Sambad Prabhakar* and the *Samachar Chandrika* raised a hue and cry about religion in danger from the "atheist beasts" who aped the "vagabond Firingis". In April 1831 the former printed a letter, "reflecting in very unbecoming language upon the character of the teachers of Hindoo College", against which the college committee was constrained to remonstrate. Clearly, the provocation was not entirely on the side of the Derozians.

Even before the newspaper campaign took shape, the managing committee of the Hindu College had become restive. On 5 February

1831 the committee had indeed patched up a quarrel between Derozio and the head master, D'Anselme; when Derozio went with a progress report to D'Anselme, the latter had "lifted his hand to strike Derozio" and when David Hare intervened, D'Anselme had called Hare "a vile sycophant". Evidently the head master had been badly rattled by the storm which had arisen round his subordinate. The incident ended with the usual expression of mutual regrets. The committee however (according to Pearychand Mitra) soon proceeded to pass resolutions "to check as far as possible all disquisitions tending to unsettle the belief of the boys in the great principles of national religion", condemning "practices inconsistent with the Hindu notions of propriety", and prohibiting "the habit of attending societies at which political and religious discussions are held". Finally, committee member Ramkamal Sen took the initiative in calling a special meeting for the removal of Derozio.

The Calcutta Presidency College (into which the old Hindu College was transformed in 1855) still preserves a volume of manuscript records containing the proceedings of the "special meeting of the directors of the Hindoo College" on 23 April 1831. A memorandum was considered proposing among other things that "Mr Derozio being the root of all evils and the cause of public alarm should be discharged from the college"; that "all those students who are publicly hostile to Hinduism and the established custom of the country . . . should be turned out"; that "if any of the boys go to see or attend public lectures to be dismissed"; that "books to be read and time for each study to be fixed." It was urged that Derozio's misconduct was causing the withdrawal of students from the college, though we find from the proceedings of 7 May and 11 June 1831 that withdrawals continued even after Derozio's dismissal.

The committee by a majority of 6 to 3 refused to pronounce Derozio "an improper person to be entrusted with the education of youth", but decided nevertheless to dismiss him "in the present state of public feeling amongst the Hindoo community". Wilson and Hare abstained on the second vote as they could not speak for that community. Radhakanta Deb, Ramkamal Sen, Radhamadhab Banerji and the governor Chandrakumar Tagore held the dismissal to be "necessary"; Prasannakumar Tagore and Rasamoy Datta thought that it was only "expedient"; Srikrishna Sinha alone maintained that it was "unnecessary". No action was taken however against the students.

On Wilson's suggestion, Derozio sent in on 25 April a resignation

letter in which he commented: "unexamined, and unheard, you resolve to dismiss me without even the mockery of a trial". In reply to Wilson's queries about the "rumoured charges" against him, Derozio sent his explanation on 26 April. His answer to the question whether he had undermined his pupils' faith in god is deservedly famous in the annals of the Bengal Renaissance:

If it be wrong to speak at all upon such a subject, I am guilty; for I am neither afraid nor ashamed to confess having stated the doubts of philosophers upon this head, because I have also stated the solution of those doubts. Is it forbidden anywhere to argue upon such a question? If so, it must be equally wrong to adduce an argument upon either side, or is it consistent with an enlightened notion of truth to wed ourselves to only one view of so important a subject, resolving to close our eyes and ears against all impressions that oppose themselves to it? . . .

Entrusted as I was for some time with the education of youth, peculiarly circumstanced, was it for me to have made them pert and ignorant dogmatists? . . . I therefore thought it my duty to acquaint several of the college students with the substance of Hume's celebrated dialogue between Cleanthes and Philo, in which the most subtle and refined arguments against theism are adduced. But I have also furnished them with Dr Reid's and Dugald Stewart's more acute replies to Hume, replies which to this day continue unrefuted. This is the head and front of my offending. . . .

That I should be called a sceptic and infidel is not surprising, as these names are always given to persons who think for themselves in religion. . . .

Derozio was forced to leave the college but the spell he had cast on the youth persisted. Krishnamohan Banerji, who was expelled from home in August 1831 for the escapades of some of his young friends, brought out an organ, the *Enquirer*, and wrote the *Persecuted* to expose the practical heterodoxy of the orthodox. Rasikkrishna Mallik, who was once drugged and bound to be carried off by relations to some safe distant place but managed to escape and run away from his father's house, arranged for a second organ, the *Jnananveshan*; the college committee proceeding of 11 June 1831 has an item — "Letter from Rossic Kisto Mullic proposing to publish a newspaper and applying for subscription" which was granted.

Derozio himself remained active and established a daily, the *East Indian*. It is pleasant to find him an idealist to the last and as uncompromising as ever — he was preaching amity between the Anglo-Indian community and other Indians and attacked in his paper the celebration of the Durga puja by Prasannakumar Tagore who called himself a follower of the theistic Rammohun.

On 17 December 1831, Derozio was stricken down with cholera. His favourite disciples rushed to his bedside and battled with death for a week. It came on 26 December and the stormy petrel of our renaissance had sunk to its rest.

Worldly occupations and private interests inevitably scattered in course of time the individual members of the Derozian group, for Young Bengal could never develop into a movement comparable to the various trends in Europe to which the same adjective has been attached. Yet for at least a dozen years after Derozio's untimely tragic death, his impact continued to be manifested in collective ways.

Radical sentiments continued to find expression every now and then. In 1832 it was reported that the Hindu College students were offering as much as Rs 8 for a copy of Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* and that one publisher had sold 100 copies at Rs 5 each. In 1836 the *Englishman* noted that the Hindu College students "are all radicals, and the followers of Benthamite principles. The very word 'tory' is a sort of ignominy among them . . . they all belong to the school of Adam Smith." In 1843 an "old Hindu", who was "engaged in heavy commercial duties", pined for revolution in a series of essays on Indian grievances.

More specific political thinking by the Derozians was also not wanting. Rasikkrishna Mallik in 1833 criticised police corruption, pointed out the unprotected status of the peasantry under the Permanent Settlement, and advocated the abolition of the political power of the merchant company; in 1834-35 he delivered impressive public orations on the revision of the company's charter and the freedom of the press. Tarachand Chakrabarti pleaded in 1842 for a state system of technical education as in Orleanist France. In 1842, Ramgopal Ghose in company with the visiting orator George Thompson of anti-slavery fame was "thundering" in the hall of the Faujdari Balakhana; in 1847 his public speaking earned him the epithet of the "Indian Demosthenes"; his *Remarks* defended against European outcry the so-called "black bills" of 1849 which had tried to abolish the judicial immunities of Europeans in India from the ordinary law. Dakshinaranjan Mukherji, in a famous essay on "Judicature and Police" in 1843, described the existing system as one of "extortion and corruption" and incidentally attributed the overthrow of our original equality to the "ambitious and domineering priesthood". Pearychand Mitra in 1846 pleaded for the protection of the ryot and rose to the level of theory when he main-

tained that "it is private property which gives rise to government, and not government to private property" (echoing Locke's thought introduced by Derozio) and that "the opulent and powerful do not require so much of its constant care and anxiety as the poor and helpless."

The Hindu College men ran several periodicals to serve as platforms. In the last year of Derozio's life, Krishnamohan Banerji inaugurated the *Enquirer* to fight Hindu obscurantism and Rasikkrishna Mallik began to organise the *Jnananveshan*, a bilingual journal which lasted till 1844 with the avowed object of instruction in the "science of government and jurisprudence". About 1838, the *Hindu Pioneer* carried an article on "India and Foreigners" which complained of the people's exclusion from any share in government or office of trust and of the unjustifiable "enormous taxation". Tarachand Chakrabarti conducted a journal called the *Quill* which freely criticised government policies. In April 1842 was started the *Bengal Spectator* which began to agitate for competitive civil service examinations and in which in 1843 Radhanath Sikdar unfolded the story of his struggle against government officials to prevent the exaction of forced labour from the Survey of India "coolies". It also supported widow-marriage in principle.

The Derozian penchant for societies was continuing. The pioneer body, the Academic Association, was kept alive till about 1839. David Hare accepted the presidentship after Derozio; when a meeting ended he would often stroll in the streets, still talking with the members. It was supplemented by an Epistolary Association in which the Derozians exchanged opinions in the true renaissance humanist style. Ramgopal Ghose and Radhanath Sikdar recorded experiences and reflections in the form of diaries, and the former's house was a regular headquarter for the circle of friends. On 20 February 1838 was launched the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge with the Derozians at the helm (president — Tarachand Chakrabarti; vice-president — Ramgopal Ghose; secretaries — Pearychand Mitra and Ramtanu Lahiri). The society which began to function on 12 March 1838 elected David Hare as honorary visitor. It published three volumes of papers read between 1840 and 1843 and including the *Nature of Historical Studies* and *Civil and Social Reform* (Krishnamohan); *Interests of the Female Sex* and the *State of Hindustan* in five parts (Pearychand); *Sketch of Bankura* (Harachandra Ghosh); *Notice of Tipperah*, a new *Spelling Book* and *Notices of Chittagong* in four parts (Gobindachandra Basak). It was a meeting of this society in the Hindu College Hall on 8 February 1843 that Principal Richardson tried to disperse

as seditious, when the president, Tarachand Chakrabarti, sharply called him to order with a famous reproof. Early in 1839 was started a short-lived Mechanical Institute. In 1844, Kishorichand Mitra founded the Hindu Theophilanthropic Society (an echo of Volney, perhaps).

The Derozian societies were cultural associations but they were being drawn towards politics. George Thompson had urged the Bengalis to "abhor expediency" and organise themselves into political associations, more efficacious than even the press. His meetings had aroused the enthusiasm of the men of Young Bengal who about this time were popularly called the "Chakraborti faction" after their seniormost associate, Tarachand. On 20 April 1843 was founded the Bengal British India Society, the "aristocracy of intelligence" as distinct from the "aristocracy of wealth" already organised in the Landholders' Association. The society was merged in the British Indian Association (when it was founded on 31 October 1851) — the first united front of the politically minded educated Indians. By that time Young Bengal as a distinct entity had faded out.

One strange episode recorded by Sivanath Sastri deserves a passing notice. Years afterwards he learned from Bombay friends of a Derozian sannyasi in Kathiawar who always praised his great teacher and once exposed the princely misrule in a series of letters to the press on "Misgovernment at Kathiawad". He was imprisoned for a year but had touched off an agitation which forced the ruler to release him and even to put him in charge of the administration with power to choose his own assistants. After a spell of reform, however, reaction reasserted itself and the sannyasi was expelled from the scene of his activities. This unnamed Derozian has much to our regret remained un-identified.

Biographical sketches of the individual representatives of Young Bengal would take too long a space, but a standard list of the inner circle may be taken from the *Life of David Hare* with their approximate available dates added: Rasikkrishna Mallik (1810–58), Dakshinananjan Mukherji (1812–87), Krishnamohan Banerji (1813–85) and Ramgopal Ghose (1815–68) — the four "firebrands" as they were called in their college days; Harachandra Ghose (1808–69), Sibchandra Deb (1811–90), Ramtanu Lahiri (1813–98), Radhanath Sikdar (1813–70) and Pearychand Mitra (1814–83) — only less famous than the first group; Madhabchandra Mallik, Maheschandra Ghose, Gobindachandra Basak and Amritlal Mitra. To these may be added an elder associate, Tarachand Chakrabarti (1804–55), and

a younger, Kishorichand Mitra. All these are famous names in the history of 19th century Bengal. There must have been many more who had come under the magic spell of a teacher who died when barely twentythree.

The Derozians were vilified in their early life when passion ran high; while their individual merits were later admitted, it has become almost a tradition to belittle Young Bengal as a trend. Rajnarayan Bose's comment in 1875 that "the light from the West had turned their heads" is the representative common judgment. It may however be contended that the favourite verdict is a distorted one, though of course a historical valuation inevitably implies a point of view.

Contemporaries were shocked mostly by the indulgence in the socially forbidden food and drink, in the "cutting their way through ham and beef and wading to liberalism through tumblers of beer." But this was mainly the means of asserting the right of individual judgment in matters of established customs, not unusual at a critical point of development. Unorthodoxy of this kind may indeed be preferable to the hypocrisy which often prevades a settled orthodox social norm.

The charge of extreme Anglicism has also been over-stressed. Besides the historical excuse of the sudden confrontation with the unexpected wealth of advanced western thought, there remains the evidence that the Derozians did not forsake their country or people in the fashion common to so many later "Anglicised" Indians. From Derozio downwards, patriotism stirred Young Bengal minds; Krishnamohan, even as a Christian missionary since 1837, studied Hindu philosophy and sastric literature; Tarachand translated *Manu*; the *Innananveshan* was conducted partly in Bengali; Ramgopal hailed the Bengali prose of the *Tatvabodhini Patrika*; Pearychand and Radhanath, two intimate friends, brought out the *Masik Patrika*, a monthly magazine in simple colloquial Bengali, understandable to ordinary literate housewives; finally, Pearychand (Tekchand Thakur) was a not unimportant contributor to our literature in both the popular and learned styles.

The accusation of irreligion, again, is not entirely correct; the Derozian aim was in truth "to summon Hinduism to the bar of their reason." As early as 1832, Maheschandra and Krishnamohan turned Christians; Sibchandra in later life became the president of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and Ramtanu was drawn close to the same faith. The Derozian criticism of early Brahmoism was not pointless; Krishnamohan's comment that it came "as far as half the way in religion and politics";

Ramgopal's charge that its anticonversion campaign had a tinge of hypocrisy; Ramtanu's penetrating remark: "The followers of Vedanta temporise. . . . I know that the subversion of idolatry is a consummation devoutly to be wished for, but I do not desire it by employing wrong means . . . there is a spirit of hostility entertained by the society against Christianity which is not creditable . . . Let the votaries of all religions appeal to the reason of their fellow creatures." Nor can one forget the personal integrity shown by so many Derozians — the impressive honesty in official life of Harachandra and Rasikkrishna; the life of service to neighbours of Sibchandra; the refusal of Ramgopal to abjure his beliefs in spite of the threat of social ostracism; Radhanath's decision, in the teeth of family opposition, not to marry a minor wife; saintly Ramtanu's heroic renunciation (as early as 1851) of the "sacred thread".

Many of Young Bengal's true limitations were not peculiarly its own but shared by our entire renaissance. The educated community of the 19th century failed to understand the exploiting character of the alien British rule in India, looking mainly at its immediate benefits; the protagonists of our "awakening" had little contact with or understanding of the toiling masses who lived in a world apart; the obsession with Hindu traditions and life kept at a distance the community of our Muslim fellow citizens. Such aspects of our renaissance heritage have seriously handicapped the democratic progress of the country.

The real failure of the Young Bengal trend, inevitable perhaps in the circumstances, was the failure to build up a sustained movement and developing ideology. Its most memorable positive aspects are a fearless rationalism and a candid appreciation of the regenerating new thought from the West. Much of this was drowned in the current of traditionalism, mysticism, religiosity and revivalism fashionable in the later part of the century. It is permissible to doubt whether the change has been a gain in our national life.

In the light of such reflections, one can at least look with a certain sympathy to the challenge of Kishorichand Mitra in 1861: "The youthful band of reformers who had been educated at the Hindoo College, like the tops of the Khanchanjunga, were the first to catch and reflect the dawn . . . When has an opposition to popular prejudices been dissociated with difficulty and trouble? . . . To excommunication and its concomitant evils, our friends were subjected . . . Conformity to the idolatrous practices and customs evinces a weak desertion of prin-



ciple. Nonconformity to them on the other hand is a moral obligation which we owe to our conscience."

To economise space it has been necessary to omit constant references to the main authorities : the *Hindu College Records* of 1831; the sketches of its history by Kishorichand Mitra (1862) and Rajnarayan Bose (1876) — the latter in the useful annotated edition by Shri Debipada Bhattacharya; the standard biographies of Derozio, Hare and Ramtanu Lahiri by Edwardes, Pearychand Mitra and Sivanath Sastri; *Sambadpatre Sekaler Katha* by Brajendranath Banerji and the very valuable study of contemporary journals in Dr B. B. Majumdar's *History of Political Thought from Rammohun to Dayananda*. Acknowledgement is also due to *Banglar Jagaran* by Kazi Abdul Wadud and to *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance* by the present author. Madge's booklet on Derozio is now easily available in a recent reprint, 1967. It corrects certain usually accepted facts.

## *Views on 1857*

*Eighteen Fifty Seven* by Surendra Nath Sen. (The Publications Division, Government of India.)

*The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857* by R. C. Majumdar. (Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta.)

THE LITERATURE on the history of the Indian "mutiny" is already enormous, though almost entirely the work of English authors. But the centenary of such a tremendous upheaval was bound to call forth additional historical efforts, while the achievement of freedom for India has made imperative Indian attempts at revaluation. It is a matter for congratulation that two of our foremost elder historians should take up the task and give us the benefit of their considered opinions. Dr Sen's volume is sponsored by the Government of India, albeit with the assurance that "it is not an 'authorised version' in any sense". Dr Majumdar's study, which came out as a private venture a little earlier, is an exposition which he thinks differs radically from the views of the political party in power. Both the surveys present a wealth of material in a handy condensed form and the ability of the two distinguished authors easily makes their contributions an integral part of the storehouse at the disposal of all future students of the subject.

Yet the reader is left with a certain feeling of disappointment. And the reviewer would like with due diffidence to indicate some points of disagreement and criticism in the hope that these will help the discussion on the Indian Revolt which is sure to continue for a long time to come.

### I

An attractive feature of Dr Majumdar's volume is its broad canvas and the wide sweep of its range. He has commendably tried to put the Revolt of 1857 in its proper setting. The entire Book I is devoted to

the first century of British rule in India with a description of the discontent and disaffection engendered by the system of British exploitation. One whole chapter deals with the earlier risings against the British, "a continual upsurge of a popular character against the British authority", "the isolated ebullitions which culminated in the great conflagration of 1857." Dr Majumdar has here utilised the illuminating researches of Dr S. B. Chaudhuri on the pre-1857 civil resistances, which recently attracted so much attention.

There is also a complete chapter on the atrocities which disgraced both sides in the turmoil. Outrages committed by the "rebels" are widely known for the publicity they have always received from the British. British atrocities which were quite as bad, and often much worse, have long been discreetly passed over. Dr Majumdar has massed together the undeniable evidences, scattered in the British writings themselves, and presented the full story with the argument that "historical truth and political fair-play both demand that the veil should be drawn aside." After all, the outrages of Neill and Renaud preceded the Kanpur massacres; the orgies of Cooper at Ujnalla, when hundreds were executed in a fashion which made one of the executioners swoon away, followed the murder of a single officer by a lone fanatic. Unconsciously, Dr Majumdar's chapter thoroughly vindicates Marx's celebrated letter on the "mutiny" atrocities written as early as 4 September 1857.

By the time Dr Majumdar reaches his final review, however (Book IV), he commits himself to old views on the character of the outbreak of 1857 which are in consonance with the orthodox tradition of the average historians of British India, and not radically different as he would like us to believe from the usual run of our scholars. What makes it all the more surprising is that much of the evidence marshalled in his own volume contradicts some of his major conclusions. There is a distinct hiatus between the logical implications of his earlier chapters and the formulations towards the end.

There is also one major slip on pages 76 and 77 where Havelock is described as the defender of Alambagh at a time when he was already dead. Again, a recent letter to the *Statesman* suggests that the "new evidence" on the Rani of Jhansi was not entirely unknown to Kincaid when he made his generous estimate of her role.

The author of the officially sponsored history of 1857 has deliberately avoided the broad treatment of the subject and the wide comprehensive sweep. Instead, Dr Sen has concentrated merely on

the military annals of the mutiny. He has produced, of course, a very competent narrative of the events of the war itself, a reliable summary of all the material available relevant to this, a very readable resume of affairs from such a specific angle. But unfortunately, this government sponsored centenary publication, for which no expense has been spared, does not give us adequately "a fresh review of the causes, character, and consequences of the sepoy war" promised in the preface. Barely 61 pages out of 418 are devoted to the causes and a review of the upheaval as a whole, and that also in a halting manner.

The technical treatment is also not always happy. The different regions are taken one by one and the full story in each case given from start to finish in an isolated manner. The impressive panoramic view of the upsurge, the totality of the crisis, is thus lost to the reader. A synoptic table of dates and events, so valuable in a work like this, has not been added. Even the useful list of the record of each sepoy regiment during the tumult occurs only in the index, and not in the body of the book. The main map does not attempt to indicate (in colour or otherwise) the campaigns and chief incidents as maps may effectively do. The sketch map of the siege of Delhi does not carry on it explanatory notes. The full English translation of the most interesting constitution of the court at Delhi has been left out.

There are also some gaps in the bibliography. It does not mention Kincaid's well-known essay on the Rani of Jhansi or Dr S. B. Chaudhuri's book on the earlier civil disturbances. Even the published notes and letters of Marx bearing on the subject have been left unnoticed. And surely a standard official history should have attempted to tap more fully the contemporary newspaper press (including, for example, the *Hindoo Patriot* or the radical and labour papers in England or France).

## II

Indian historical scholarship is still obsessed with the ghost of Ranke. The foreword to *Eighteen Fifty Seven* begins with the remark that "no objective history of the struggle had yet been written" and that "the time had now come to write a new and objective history of the movement."

Historical writing, however, involves a process of selection from the mass of available facts on the basis of the author's conception of what is important and relevant and what is not; an arrangement of the selected material in a coherent manner; an attempt to draw possible

links between different events; a presentation of reflections and inferences which occur to the mind. All these imply a point or points of view, an outlook which is the product of a certain experience and environment. It is idle to pretend that one can shake off such points of view. What can be done is, however, to examine again and again the rationality of a particular point of view and to guard against any suppression of the source material.

The foreword itself falls short of the vaunted "objectivity." Apart from an excessive reference to the first person singular, it proclaims that in 1857 we cannot find "a single instance when there was a clash on a communal basis." This is, of course, belied by the communal fracas at Bijnor, Moradabad, Sirsa, etc. (Majumdar, pp. 60, 65.) The correct conclusion about the remarkable Hindu-Muslim unity in 1857 does not require the sweeping assertion that prior to British rule there was never a Hindu-Muslim problem in our country. And surely it is only a point of view which leads Maulana Azad to deduce from the events of 1857 the deep loyalty of all India to the Mughal court. In Oudh, the chief seat of the popular insurrection, the loyalty of the people turned rather to the old local ruling house which had cut off its formal dependence on Delhi many years ago.

Most of the previous books on the "mutiny," the foreword points out, were written from the British point of view. That point of view has unfortunately penetrated deep into orthodox Indian scholarship itself. The chapter on causes in our official history of 1857 begins just in the old tradition with the detailed grievances of the sepoys from Vellore to the greased cartridge; but the century of civil resistances against British rule is quietly ignored. We read of the British anxiety "to share the blessings of western civilisation" with the Indian people and "the zeal for reform and improvement"; but little emphasis is laid on the system of British exploitation on which there are mountains of facts and which surely is not less obvious than the progress under British rule. One whole paragraph in the chapter on causes deals with the abolition of the sati as a grievance, in the true English style. "The equality of all persons in the eyes of law" is held up as another of the grievances of the Indian aristocracy; the extortions in the practice of revenue collection revealed by the official inquiry on torture are incidentally passed over.

Following the language of English records, our government sponsored history consistently talks of "loyal" elements, the contagion of "rebellion", etc. The reader is not told of the basic fact that India

had come under a colonial imperial domination like some other unfortunate regions of the world which were also trying to shake off the foreign yoke. The social revolution being effected by England in India is equated on page 412, not with the destruction of the ancient economy, but with a few social reforms of doubtful efficacy. The impression is produced necessarily by such treatment that the important thing about the Indian revolt was an unfortunate and lamentable conjunction of the follies and blunders of the rulers and the prejudices and misconceptions of the ruled. No distinction is drawn with sufficient emphasis between the immediate causes which set off the explosion and the deeper causes which led to the spread of the fire far and wide.

### III

All discussion about the Revolt of 1857 must turn to the question of its characterisation. In the words of Dr Majumdar, we have to face "the main point at issue, namely the nature of the great outbreak" to be "deduced from the evidence at our disposal." This involves three problems: Was there a popular revolt in 1857-58? Can the movement be regarded as a national struggle? Should the social content of the upheaval be labelled as a feudal reaction?

Was the outbreak a popular revolt, over and above the undoubted military mutiny? Dr Sen admits in a guarded manner that "the revolt commanded popular support in varying degrees in the principal theatres of war." Dr Majumdar notes that it "drifted into a general revolt", but proceeds at once to quote the typically official "brilliant analysis" of Raikes which could "satisfactorily explain" all the facts. The gist of Raikes's explanation is that the fall of British authority engendered natural civil disturbances — "when disaffection means more money, more power, and no taxes, its growth is a mere necessity of human nature." In short, there was a relapse to the primeval state of nature which is supposed to lurk behind all civilisation, a return to the anarchy of the tradition of "the free lances."

Vividly the question of a point of view crops up here, for where in all history will we find a popular revolt which cannot, if you like, be thus characterised? Was the analysis of Norton in 1858, summarised by Dr Majumdar himself, less convincing than that of Raikes? In Oudh, "the whole population was up in arms." There were innumerable fights with matchlockmen and spearmen or bowmen, obviously different from the sepoy mutineers. English refugees "dare not approach the villagers." Nowhere could government officers organise

the people for resistance. The people did not show any opposition to the old proprietors who had come back. The *Narrative of Events* issued by government on 13 September 1857 said: "In consequence of the general nature of the rebellion and the impossibility of identifying the majority of the rebels, magistrates recommended the wholesale burning and destruction of all villages proved to have sent men to take active part in the rebellion." In Oudh, Holmes estimated the number of armed men "who succumbed" at about 150,000, of whom the sepoys were only about 35,000. "English administration in Oudh had vanished like a dream" — said Forrest.

Was the rebellious mentality merely an Oudh phenomenon? Contemporary writers speak of the disaffection, even hatred, of the "natives" towards the English in all parts of Northwest and Central India, just as Russel noted "the beclouded countenance of the villagers around" after the fall of Sankarpur. A Tirhut observer remarked that "every success or fresh rising of the mutineers was marked here with a look of satisfaction"; and Dr Duff explained the little progress in extinguishing the disorders by the fact that it was "a rebellion or revolution." John Lawrence wrote on 19 April 1858: "Had a single leader of ability arisen among them — we must have been lost beyond redemption." Bishop Heber had remarked long before: "Natives of India do not really like us and — if a fair opportunity be offered — would gladly avail themselves of it to rise against us." At Meerut the people at large taunted the sepoys into mutiny; at Jhansi women were seen working in the batteries.

True, military mutinies preceded civil risings generally. Nothing else could be expected where people were unarmed and confronted with a modern military machine. Even then, there were plenty of exceptions — at Muzaffarnagar, Etah, Lucknow on 31 May 1857. There were riots at Patna, insurrection in Chota Nagpur, outbreaks in Hyderabad and the Maratha country, risings in East Punjab — and so on and so forth.

Dr Sen has noted in passing that the Bhils were found wanting by the authorities at the crisis; that the British rulers could not depend on the loyalty of the Punjab villagers; that the Punjabi population also contributed to the rebel strength — to take only a few examples at random.

The cumulative evidence is strong enough to establish the popular character of the Indian revolt, if we adopt the criterion which is generally followed in dealing with the history of other lands. The

evidence is not new and is duly recorded in the books under review, but in a scattered manner. And if a historian in his summing up considers these facts as unimportant or irrelevant, his point of view can fairly come under criticism.

#### IV

Can the revolt be regarded as a national struggle against foreign rule? Here obviously the answer depends on what we understand by the term "national".

According to Dr Majumdar, a war of national independence was out of the question at that time — "nationalism or patriotism, in the true sense, was conspicuous by its absence in India till a much later date." The catch, of course, is in the phrase "in the true sense." Naturally, the national idea goes on changing from period to period and our "true" concepts may be more precise or developed than in the past. The ideal of an unified all-India nation state or a democratic republic in India was certainly premature for most people in the 19th century, but that does not justify us in denying a national character to far-flung popular struggles for liberation from alien rule, struggles of a more or less unified nature commanding the sympathy of large masses of the population. Such a rigid conception of nationalism "in the true sense" may even lead one to deny the label to the Spanish guerillas or Russian peasants fighting Napoleon; to the French princes and peoples inspired by Joan of Arc to drive out the English intruders; to the Italian Carbonari who had not yet thought of rising in the name of united Italy. We cannot have double standards in historical judgements.

It has to be emphasised that the formation of an all-in national government for the whole country is not the sine qua non in national aspirations. That had not occurred even to Machiavelli. Bourgeois democratic consciousness, the "conception of individual liberty", need not be sought in the cruder nationalism of the "mutiny" days, just as we do not expect people's democratic concepts in our national ideas of the early 20th century. But common subjection to a foreign power which was also relentlessly breaking down the old social fabric might easily have been strengthening an Indian sentiment, a vague kind of national feeling which was not yet informed enough for the handful of advanced educated idealists.

It is perfectly in order to point out the crude nature of the nationalism in the air in 1857, as we may very well do in dealing with other



periods in history as well. But that is no reason to deny the national elements in the widespread upheaval which was not "in the same category" as the old wars of the Indian Country Powers when no war of extermination engulfed the land as in 1857. It is amusing that Indian historians skilled in realising the fundamental unity of India and in finding national elements in Rajput heroism. Akbar's liberalism, or Maratha resurgence suddenly turn to different criteria when confronted with a tumultuous popular upsurge against alien rule.

Some of the ideas advanced by Dr Majumdar are curious. A national war of independence "presupposes a definite plan and organisation." Not necessarily, as the history of Polish national revolts demonstrates. Our historian could have spared himself the trouble of debunking the leaders as organisers of a general conspiracy. In relation to the main argument, that was merely tilting at the wind mills. Dr Majumdar is convinced that the "mutiny" could not have been national as it did not differ much in character from earlier anti-British risings. Of course, these were also popular in nature like the "mutiny" but in the case of the latter, the extensive area, the simultaneous outburst, and the sweep of popular participation lift it to a much higher level.

The eminent historian lays great stress on the limited area of the revolt and the limited number of the actual rebels, to prove that this could not have been a national struggle. The argument of the limited scope was often actually used by the British rulers to minimise our national movement of later days — even in the swadshahi or non-cooperation epochs. In this connection Dr Sen's remarks are quite pertinent: "Only a determined minority takes an active part in a revolution while the overwhelming majority remains passive, and an interested section might openly align itself with the existing order." The claim of national status for a movement in the broad sense depends on its aim of liberation from foreign rule, widespread popular participation in the struggle, and general, not necessarily universal, support and sympathy. "There is not the slightest doubt that the rebels wanted to get rid of the alien government." (Sen, p. 411.) The evidence for popular participation has been indicated above. As for general sympathy for the rebels in region after region, the facts admit of little doubt.

The conscious attempt at Hindu-Muslim unity, in spite of occasional clashes, strengthens this line of reasoning. The Azamgarh proclamation calling upon Indians of all classes to rise against the faithless

British; the Delhi proclamation urging all Hindus and Muslims to unite in the struggle; the efforts of the leaders in Delhi and Bareilly to reassure the Hindus indicate strivings towards some kind of a national outlook. And by what standards can we deny the title of patriot to the Maulavi of Faizabad or Firuz Shah?

Where Dr Majumdar had led a frontal assault, Dr Sen fights a rear-guard action and lands himself in some implicit contradiction. He says: "Outside Oudh and Shahabad there is no evidence of that general sympathy which would invest the mutiny with the dignity of a national war." He himself states elsewhere that even in the undisturbed provinces "there was a feeling of impotent disaffection that delighted in every news of British reverse" and that "the people of India felt that they had something in common as against the Englishmen." This is an element of national feeling as distinct from the usual petty localised parochialism, the general sympathy for which he said there was no evidence. That it flared up into an open national war in and around Oudh was due to special reasons, but it was touch and go in very many areas. The British practice at least made no mistake of minimising the danger of the national challenge and went all out to terrorise the entire people.

It is odd to find Dr Sen commenting that "no moral issues were involved in the war of 1857". One would have thought that a popular attempt to throw off foreign domination over large areas when that domination was admittedly oppressive was a sufficiently moral objective.

## V

But was not the upheaval in 1857, after all, a feudal reactionary movement? Dr Majumdar has no hesitation in calling it the "dying groans of an obsolete aristocracy and centrifugal feudalism of the medieval age." Dr Sen holds that the "mutiny leaders would have set the clock back — they wanted a counterrevolution." But he adds cautiously the pertinent comment — "whether military success would have ensured it is another question."

Where feudal ideas are still very powerful, as in 1857, a general movement would be necessarily feudal to that extent. But in the usual characterisation of the "mutiny", "feudal" is quietly equated with "reactionary." The equation, however, is blandly forgotten when our scholars praise the traditional culture of the country also shaped by feudal times.

In the revolt of 1857 feudal ideas are clear enough in the instinctive

turn to the restoration of the empire; in the loyalties to the local chiefs; in the characteristic disorganisation; in the hatred towards western reforms. But they are not sufficient to brand the great upsurge as reactionary. The wars of liberation, if they had not been crushed by superior military power, might easily have generated new ideas and new strength. To beat down British power and to prevent a reconquest, a new energy, western military technique, effective organisation, general cooperation would have become imperative. To assert that new progress would have necessarily emerged may very well be dogmatic. To deny that possibility is even more so.

✓The general aim — the expulsion of foreign rule and the destruction of what was felt by the mass of people as oppression — cannot fairly be labelled as feudal reaction. ¶ If the revolt was unorganised and spontaneous, as our authors have established, the theory of feudal leadership is automatically destroyed. ¶ Not one important feudal ruler joined the revolt, the feudal princes betrayed it rather. The number of rebellious chiefs “would not probably exceed one per cent.” (Majumdar, p. 225.) The overwhelming majority of the landlords stood steadily by the alien overlords as protectors, except in the special case of the Oudh talukdars.

/The English educated classes were against the movement for their eyes were naturally turned to the benefits only of British rule and the fascination of the moderate constitutional liberal path of progress. (Looking back after a century, one is not bound to accept their evaluation.) Aware of the evils of the old feudalism, they had not yet realised the terrible price exacted by colonial imperialism, the brunt of the burden of which was borne by the less fortunate common people. In their relatively isolated sphere in the country's life, they were even coming under the spell of the mystic idea that British conquest was the instrument of providence for India's uplift, an idea at which the modern historian can only smile.

## *The National Council of Education*

I OFFER you my heartfelt thanks for your courtesy in making me your guest of honour on this memorable day, though being an outsider I am unworthy for the distinction. I had an opportunity of serving, for almost five years, the Jadavpur University from its inauguration but I had never the privilege of becoming a member of the National Council. When, about 1960, I wanted to join, I was told that its portals were now closed. Of course, in the heroic days of the struggle waged by the Council, circumstances had kept me afar, and I had never shared its glorious burden. Today therefore I can speak only as a student of History, not as a participant of the fight in the past. I crave your indulgence for the garrulity of old age and your gracious forgiveness for any unpleasant comments which may creep into a historical analysis of a noble heritage.

I

I shall begin with a mention of the different aspects in the ideals of the National Council which sprang naturally out of the life of our 19th century renaissance.

The first element was the battle for the establishment of our own control over the education system in the country. In those days foreign domination was prevalent all over the land, and education of course was no exception. With the origin and development of a national consciousness, it was most natural that a demand would arise for a national control over our own education, for the belief that a people's education must be in the hands of the people concerned.

Secondly, the idea gradually gathered strength that the content of education must reflect the real needs of the people, the substance of education must be shaped to fit the character of the country, that the alien ideas and subject-matter suited to foreign lands must be eradicated. That is, we must remove not merely foreign control but also the foreign content of our education.

Thirdly, many of our 19th century educationists veered round to the view that our educational system must develop a technical-scientific bias for the industrial development of the land. Otherwise we were bound to go down in the face of competition with the outer world, and remained bogged down into the sluggish quagmire of the past. Science and technology were of course the products of the West, but it was essential for us to utilise and master them. In fact, the prevalent educational system in 19th century India had largely a science-less learning. ✓ Our foreign masters in effect wanted to provide opportunities for some professional openings for the upper-middle class: teachers, lawyers, doctors, government employees and mercantile officers up to a level. The aim for the lower middle class was of course the recruitment of a horde of clerks. Pure science and practical technology were thus neglected. And our national educationists wanted to remove this slant, to open new horizons in the field of our education.

Fourthly, there was the problem of the educational medium. In 19th century schools and colleges, we were taught in the alien English language. It is however an established truth that students cannot master what they are taught except through the vernacular medium. In a foreign medium, most students fail to develop a free thinking and have to fall back on committing text-books to memory and parrot-like repetitions, with a grasp of the real meaning. Moreover, education in a foreign medium tended to create a deep chasm, an unfathomable gulf between the English educated gentle-folk and the common masses. Some of our 19th century intellectuals thus became advocates for the vernacular medium in education. ✓

Fifthly, the ideal of mass education. ✓ The 19th century education was meant for a handful of the upper layer of society. Without the education of the masses, the people would remain a multitude of backward individuals. Hence it was natural for our thoughtful men to think in terms of an education of the whole people.

## II

When, on 11 March 1906, the National Council of Education was established, the main achievement in my opinion of its full-fledged ideal was the incorporation, at least on paper, of all of the five elements indicated above: Nation Control, National Content, Technological-Scientific Bias, Vernacular Medium, Mass Education. On an anniversary day, it will be fit and proper however to recall the pioneers,

though they tended to emphasise one or other element only in the total ideal. We may in this connection humbly remind us that even the National Council has not yet succeeded in embodying the full ideal in practice.

It was Rammohun Roy who, in his famous 1923 letter to the Governor-General, emphasised the need for teaching 'useful sciences' like mathematics, natural science, chemistry, physiology. There were some efforts in this direction in the Hindu College, but the higher education in English in our country remained a literary pursuit. The authorities turned down Rammohun's proposals, and even a half-century later Calcutta University could not provide for higher education in Science.

It is probable that higher education was not at first feasible except through the English medium. The Indian languages were still undeveloped. But long after Macaulay's time, was not Bengali sufficiently enriched by the last quarter of the 19th century? Had not Bengali acquired by that stage enough strength through the achievements of our literary men? The Bengali medium did not come because our alien rulers had no interest in the matter, and our educated men had grown too accustomed to the prevalent system. Yet some of our intellectuals did raise the cause of the Bengali medium even in that age. The Derozians are derided as slavish Anglophils, but they did run some Bengali periodicals. As early as 1838, one of them — Udaychandra Dutt — advocated strongly the adoption of Bengali. The Tatvabodhini Pathsala, founded by Debendranath Tagore in 1840, had as one of its aims the teaching through Bengali.

Yet another expression of growing national awareness appeared in Nabagopal Mitra's National School (1870), perhaps the first use of the term 'national' in the name of a school.

Bankimchandra Chatterji in the *Bangadarshan* epoch emphasised another element — the education for the masses. We see in his writings, for example in 1872 and 1878, a deep anguish that the prevalent mode of education created constantly a growing chasm between the educated gentlemen and the deprived masses. He emphatically stressed the need for primary elemental education, curtailing even the educational funds for the upper stratum.

In 1886, Pramathanath Bose wrote a small but significant book advocating the introduction of technical training and the spread of practical technology. From the next year began the almost annual resolutions of the National Congress aiming at an agitation for technical education.

In the last decade of the 19th century a demand for the Bengali medium in our higher education gathered strength. Even Vice-chancellor Gurudas Banerji lent his support to the call in the Convocation Addresses of 1891 and 1892. The opinion was supported by the scientist Prafullachandra Ray and Ramendrasundar Tribedi. 1893 saw the publication of an epoch-making essay by Rabindranath Tagore: "Sikshar Herfer". He pointed out that a foreign medium keeps aloof the educated classes from the common masses; yet education itself remains stunted, incomplete; education is reduced to a parrot-lore devoid of independent free thinking. His essay is an answer to all the arguments ever advanced against Bengali as our medium of instruction.

In 1895, Satischandra Mukherji established his 'Bhagabat Chatuspathi' with the purpose of training up a select band of cadre who would devote themselves to propagate Swadeshi education and culture. He started in 1897 his *Dawn Magazine* famous for its many impressive and instructive discussions on education. Next year he received a notable letter from Sir George Birdwood of England which maintained that western science and technology must of course be incorporated in Indian education, but the main emphasis ought to be on the Indian spiritual cultural heritage and this required necessarily Indian control over the system of education in the country. The *Dawn Magazine* publicised this letter in 1899. Undoubtedly this letter from a foreign friend profoundly influenced the National Council of Education built by Satischandra himself later on.

In 1901, Rabindranath started his celebrated School at Santiniketan. The first attempt was to build a 'Brahmacharyasram', an almost ascetic institution on ancient traditional lines; at this stage, Brahmanādhav Upadhyay, almost a monk himself, was an active worker. But the permanent form in which the school grew up was something different with its perennial values for child-education. Rabindranath's ideal was that children's education should best be in the bosom of native, in an intimate connection with mother-earth; that this involves a residential institution where teachers and students live in an intimate fellowship; that school-life must run on easy simple, luxury-free lines; that an atmosphere of beauty would be built up with music and fine arts provided; that the children are to be taught in their own language as medium of instruction.

The *Dawn Magazine* was carrying on its own activity in a tireless fashion. In 1902, Satischandra built the 'Dawn Society'. He stressed

creative original thinking and research. Distinguished students in the city began to come within his fold.

Rabindranath Tagore drew attention to another direction in his 1904 essay on 'Swadeshi Samaj'. In it he emphasised some of the simple methods in popular education. The village fairs, thronged by people, could be utilised for example. 'Jatras', the talks known as 'Katha-katha', magic lantern lectures are not very expensive. Tagore's advice was to use such methods to popularise the people's education.

In 1904, Jogendrachandra Ghose on the other hand organised a society which aimed at an expansion of scientific-technical instruction. He created a fund which started sending some students abroad for higher training in science and industry.

In 1905, there were many discussions carried on by two magazines, Tagore's *Bhandar* and Satischandra's *Dawn*. Very many thoughtful people participated.

In the first wave of the Swadeshi Movements, a natural emphasis was put on free education free from alien control. The cry was to snatch away our own education from the foreigner's grasp. In July 1905, the newspaper *Sandhya* gave a call for a National University; Calcutta University with its foreign tutelage was promptly dubbed as the 'slave-camp' of the Goldighi.

### III

The proclaimed ideals of our National Council of Education did not therefore just drop from the skies. Many aspects in them did appear in the renaissance thought of our own 19th century. But this is how history unfolds itself. Yet the linking up of the different elements was no mean task. The presumptions challenges of our rulers like Curzon did act like a catalyst in the matter.

In 1904, Curzon enacted his new University Act. In the name of raising educational standards, what he did want in reality was a curtailment of education itself, a reduction in the numbers of discontented students, a cornering of the seditious educated group. He did not even refrain from insulting the Bengali people itself with his ridicule and satire. In 1905 came the partition of Bengal. Historians have proved that the government did not aim at administrative simplification so much as to cut up the Bengali people itself by putting the segments under different provincial administrations. The reply came up in an outburst of emotions pent-up for long decades. The Swadeshi Movement is its name in our annals.



The sword of repression came down on our aggrieved students in October-November 1905 through the Carlyle and Lyon Circulars, followed a little later by the Risley Circular. Students tainted with Swadeshi were to be taught a lesson by their rustication from their institutions. In the first few weeks more than 300 students were thus expelled. A distinguished headmaster in East Bengal — Kaliprasanna Dasgupta — was removed from his post.

History has recorded a prompt response to the gauntlet thrown down by the British rulers.

As early as August 1905, an anticipation of the attack led to the creation of a Fund by Bipinchandra Pal and S. K. Mullick. In September an Appeal was issued for the boycott of university examinations in the name of some of its distinguished students — Radhakumud Mukherji, Rabindranarayan Ghose, Nripendrachandra Banerji, the Eshan scholar Benoykumar Sarkar. On November 4, 1905, Sachindradas Bose started the Anti-Circular Society as a reply to the Carlyle Circular. He and Ramakanta Roy proceeded to Rangpur and set up there the first National School (November 8). Calcutta was having almost every day students' gatherings in the grounds of the Field and Academy Club and in the Goldighi. On November 9, Sobodhchandra Mallik promised a donation of 1 lakh of rupees for national education. His grateful people dubbed him with the honorific title of Raja in a meeting on November 9, at the 'Panti' fields. Within the next few days came an offer of five lakhs from Brajendrakishore Raychaudhuri, the zemindar of Gauripur, conveyed through Monomohan Bhattacharya who was intimate with Satischandra. A little later, Suryakanta Acharya Chaudhuri, Mymensingh zemindar, gifted two and a half lakhs of rupees. We may regard these three princely gifts as the financial pillars of the coming National Council of Education.

We are told that an eminent national leader, Ashutosh Chaudhuri, was overwhelmed with emotion in the students' gathering on 11 November 1905. On the 14th November, he summoned a special meeting of distinguished leaders. On the 16th, at the meeting called by him was set up a Provisional Committee which was entrusted with the task of arranging the introduction of a scheme for national education. The Moderate leaders who were present on the day's meeting at once marked the occasion by securing a withdrawal of the appeal for the boycott of examinations. This made apparent an intention to keep both options open. That the Extremists did not like this was

made obvious by two public meetings (November 24 and 26) addressed by Bipinchandra Pal and Leakat Husain. It was obvious that there was already a cleavage within the National Education movement.

The leaders met again on December 10. But the outcome was only further delay: a Committee of Ways and Means was set up to devise a practical plan. From the beginning the leaders were moving in a slow mysterious fashion; perhaps this is the tempo suited to 'Leaders'. The third and final meeting came full 92 days later on 11 March 1906. The National Council of Education was set up at long last. And year after year, this date is observed as the anniversary of the Council, rightly perhaps.

#### IV

The five elements I enumerated in a previous section as the manifestation of our 19th century renaissance thought were all duly incorporated in the declaration of the National Council, though a carping critic may comment that mass education did not get its due emphasis.

Satischandra Mukherji proclaimed that education must be made attractive, easily intelligible, realistic, less time-consuming than the prevalent system. It was announced that National Education would stand on its own legs in a free and independent style without any direct confrontation against the existing structure. Another 'influence' of the Moderate leadership?

A sort of a split appeared within the National Council very shortly after. The majority wanted a three-dimensional instruction — literary-scientific-technical.

In the opinion of the minority, this was too ambitious a scheme. We must pick up the most necessary task. All energy must be devoted to the most immediate task before the country: technological education; a sprinkling of science teaching has of course to be added.

On 26 July 1906 the split materialised. The minority set up its own institution — the Organization Committee for Technical Education. Its chief patron was the wealthy Taraknath Palit. It was with his money that the Bengal Technical Institute was set up in his house at 92 Upper Circular Road, with Pramathanath Bose as the first principal. The renowned Jadavpur College of Engineering is the direct off-spring of this Institute.

On the other hand, the majority had proceeded to set up its National School and College to impart the three-dimensional education. The first principal was the great Aurobindo Ghose himself. For

the first couple of years or so, the director was Satischandra Mukherji. The legitimate heir of the 'three-dimensional' education is the present Jadavpur University.

Apart from the difference in the content of the education to be imparted, were there other factors at play behind the split? There are indications in some of the contemporary letters (written by Nareshchandra Sengupta etc.) and the diaries of Hemendraprasad Ghose that some prominent workers in the field were kept out of the National Council. The list did not include some prominent names such as Krishnakumar Mitra (the editor of the *Sanjibani*, who started the first school in Calcutta for rusticated students), Sachindraprasad Bose (the founder of the Anti-Circular Society), Prankrishna Acharya etc. Was it an accident that some at least of those left out happened to be Brahmo by faith?

My own teacher, Haranchandra Chakladar, gave us an explanation in his essay in the National Council Golden Jubilee Volume. Apparently, there was apart from the difference on the content of education a divergence on the issue of religious instruction. The Brahmos and their sympathisers apprehended that the National Council would develop a leaning towards Hindu orthodoxy which would gather strength more and more. It is significant that Rabindranath Tagore became more and more aloof. There was possibly some truth behind the apprehension. Undoubtedly Satischandra, who was the director at the beginning, did lean heavily towards religious orthodoxy; he even retired after a time from the mundane life around. The declared aim of his *Bhagabat Chatuspathi* was 'full education in Hindu life, culture, and conduct'. The *Dawn Magazine* had as one of its aims 'the special study of Hindu life, thought, and religion'. The friend of Satischandra, Birdwood wrote in his letter that he meant India to be a 'Hindu India' which must cultivate its own heritage of spiritual wealth. The *Sandhya* talked about the cultivation of 'Aryan' culture. And the foundation document of the National Council itself proposed instruction in religion.

Perhaps in all this there was not much to worry about. Of course Brajendrakishore Raychaudhuri laid down as a condition of his gift that a tenth of the annual interest must be spent in the religious education of Hindu students; arrangements were made accordingly. A later donation instituted a special prize for proficiency in *Geeta* studies. Hindu students were required to appear at an examination in religion. But the Council was ready to provide instruction in other

faiths, provided donations were forthcoming for the purpose. Probably the votaries of minority religions had not the resources needed for the purpose. Or, they might have lacked the necessary zeal. Some perhaps inclined to the belief that it was irrational to mix up religious belief with a course of educational program.

## V

The stream of National Education thus flowed on in two currents. In Bowbazar the National School and College tried to steer a 'three-dimensional' educational scheme. And at 92 Upper Circular Road (the later home of the Calcutta University Science College), the Bengal Technical Institute ran what may be called 'one and a half dimensional' course (technology and some science).

In the Bengal National College, Aurobindo Ghose was the principal in the first year; he resigned to plunge in active politics. His task was taken over by Satischandra Mukherji, who withdrew later on for purposes unknown, drawn perhaps by mystic faith. Very able teachers had gathered round the college among whom were Sakhambari Ganguly, the well-known patriot; Dharmanand Kosambi (the father of the famous scholar, Kosambi of our times); Radhakumud Mukherji; Rabindranarayan Ghose; Benoykumar Sarkar; Haranand Chakrabarti.

Unfortunately however, the in-flow of students began very soon to dry up. This is proved by the periodical reports of the Council. The idea of a National University proved to be a mirage. Even during the stormy turmoil of the Non-cooperation Movement, the crowd of students did not turn to the National Council.

On the other hand, the Bengal Technical Institute was fairly successful. Though Benoykumar Sarkar ridiculed it as a 'mistri-making workshop', it seemed that a narrower path had some advantages. Clearly, people were more eager for a practical training in technique, for real needs. The scheme for a wider education might very well have seemed then to be a distant dusky ideal. And, technical training then was not easily avoidable elsewhere.

Pressure of circumstances like the lack of available space led in 1910 the two sections of the original National Council to come together at 92 Upper Circular Road, under a 'united' National Council as an umbrella as it were. The main work continued to be 'mistri-making'; but along it was set up a number of professorial chairs, some

courses of lectures, a certain amount of research; students were also to be sent abroad for higher education.

It must be admitted that the high hopes of 1906 had faded out. The 'fading out' is however applicable to very many aspects of our entire Swadeshi Movement. What were the reasons for the frustration in the particular case of the National Council?

A cruel hard truth has to be mentioned first. The 'National' degree had no market value; it could not provide poverty-stricken Bengalis any employment. The technical training certificate had more worth, being unavailable elsewhere. But there was a pitfall even here. Great hopes had arisen in Swadeshi days of a big industrial growth with very many jobs in the new industry. Unfortunately, there was little progress in the industrial sphere as well.

A second fact was that our mammoth Indian-owned colleges had not responded to the call of the National Council of Education. There were great expectations that these colleges with their host of students would gather the new standard. They did not however break the magic spell of the 'slave-camp'.

A little later, some drastic changes appeared in the University itself, the 'slave-camp' divided in 1905. The lead was taken by Ashutosh Mukherji, who had not linked himself with the National Council movement. His own cherished dream was to transform the University itself, and a magnetic personality was his instrument in the task. Under his leadership, the University was no longer an organ for examinations; he tacked on to it an institution of higher post-graduate teaching centre. Special measures were introduced for the cultivation of Bengali and other Indian languages. Subjects like history were revised and expanded. The first real Science College in India was founded with the collection of princely donations from Taraknath Palit and Rasbehari Ghose. The paths of original research opened out. Great scholars were invited to adorn the professorial chairs. It was made even possible to free the University from the shackles of government control. The massive waves of Non-co-operation failed to shake the new edifice of the University.

The achievements of Ashutosh Mukherji were of course a little later in date. For, the currents of National Education were drying up even by 1910. Did one reason lie in the conservatism of the Council leaders themselves? When the student upsurge came in 1906, the National Council did not act with sufficient daring, perhaps because of the ultra-caution of the Moderates. When the favourable

moment passes away, it is only natural that the setback cannot be retrieved and success eludes our grasp. Many a new National School in the districts came under the spell of the Extremists and did not even seek affiliation from the Council. They were conducted by the local people, or by the famous revolutionary societies in East Bengal; these roused the anxieties of the alien Government (which did not bother over-much about the National Council). The Council leaders tried even to ban politics in the district schools and the attempt was promptly ridiculed by Aurobindo Ghose as a 'Swadeshi Risley Circular'. Was this the reason for Aswinikumar Datta's decision to keep his celebrated Brajamohan College out of the umbrella of the National Council?

In this context, one may refer to the later criticism by the veteran revolutionary, Hemchandra Kanungo, of the frailties of National Council of Education. Of course Hemchandra was a master of sharp invectives, sparing no one; his comments were not contemporary and much of an after-thought. Yet one can hardly dismiss off-hand a penetrative critic like him. Hemchandra held that the National Education of the epoch achieved nothing very new and could not grasp the basic needs of our country; it was very much an imitation of the system already prevalent; it unduly glorified our past heritage; the vernacular medium was almost totally neglected. Unpalatable comments no doubt, but surely we cannot brush his criticism away in any necessary introspection of our past.

## VI

Yet, in history, ideals are always dimmed under the pressure of objective circumstances. Expectations are bound to slide down to a lower key. The National Council of Education failed to achieve very many things. To deny this would be a travesty of the truth. But, by what reasoning can we brush off what was achieved in those days? Can we in justice forget the heroic daring struggle to keep alive an independent institution outside the control of our foreign rulers? The hard fight to awaken the people's self-respect? The success, albeit partial, which was achieved? To keep alive, year after year, the flame of technical education? The endless sacrifices of the common workers in the cause, even though we may ignore the leaders? Are all these mere nothings? And can History forget this?

Today we recall the memory of a band of heroic teachers and students who showed the strength of giving up their worldly interests-

(how many of us can do this?). We remember those who could uphold at least the truncated form of the ideals of National Education, who through manifold privations could to some extent enrich the realm of knowledge. In spite of all shortcoming, they are immortals in History. The real question is today — can the Jadavpur University live up to such noble heritage? If it cannot, surely the Anniversary celebration becomes meaningless.

For the sake of completing the story, I shall try to put within a small compass the long annals after 1910. With Taraknath Palit turning away, the National Council and its different segments found (October 1912) a new shelter at Panahabate Villa in Maniktala. In 1917, the Bengal National College was forced to assume an attenuated form under the name Bengal National Academy. Even this had to be abandoned. What remained was the Bengal Technical Institute. Survival of this also would have been difficult but for Rasbehari Ghose's promise of the handsome gift of 12 lakhs of rupees (1921). This was indeed the turn of the tide. In 1922, the Calcutta Corporation made available in the then suburban area as much as one hundred bighas of land to the institute to house its workshops and residences. On the 16th Anniversary of the National Council, the foundation was laid on this site of the Aurobindo-Bhavan which is still the core of the complex of our entire Institution. In 1924, the Institute moved at last to its own home on its own grounds. An annual grant from the Corporation materialised in 1927 — with the assistance of the historian Narendranath Laha. Further stretches of land were made available by the Corporation in 1929. In the previous year, the Technical Institute had been renamed as the Jadavpur College of Engineering and Technology. Even since 1910 however a supervision over the institute had been vested in the National Council of Education. Meanwhile, the Engineering College had earned a reputation all over the country; its degrees were being recognised even by the government; some foreign universities had started a process of recognition as well. With the advent of our Independence, the chance at last came for the realisation of the original plans of the National Council of Education. And the foundation of the Jadavpur University in 1955 may be said to have embodied the first dreams.

## VII

I shall end this survey by raising with your permission a few questions and problems.

The National Council of Education still exists. It has been given its own weightage in the organisational structure of the new University. Is it not possible and desirable to expand its body? Very many people regard it as a closed circle, an oligarchy. The idea seems to have been fostered in the early days. To expand an organisation is of course risky. Is it not equally risky to persist in the policy of the closed door?

If the Jadavpur University is the bearer of the ideal of the original three-dimensional education, does it not signify an equal status for each of the three Faculties? In my own time at least, one would detect a trend of the more prestigious Engineering wing extending its sway all over the University itself.

At the inception of the University could be seen a healthy desire for closer contacts and interlinkings in instruction. There was a pleasant practice styled General Knowledge — in which Arts students could pick up some science and Science and Engineering boys could be given some rudiments of history and literature. Is it true that such exchanges have now fallen into disuse. If correct, this is surely a backward slide.

Lastly, what has happened to the Bengali medium? I do not believe that even now it is not possible to teach everything in Bengali. How could Satyendranath Bose teach in Bengali higher mathematics? If foreign terms are unavoidable, they could very well be written in the Bengali script. The symbols of science have already become current in an international form. The peculiarity of a language lies in its verbs, pronouns, some adjectives, the structure of sentences. Foreign nouns may easily be borrowed in our script of course. It is still necessary for us to learn English as the gate to the treasury of knowledge — but such a tool of necessity is not identical with a medium of instruction. I remember that in the first draft rules of our University it was stipulated that English would be retained, 'pending the introduction of Bengali as the medium'. Will 'pending' remain as 'pending' for ever? Why should non-Bengali students be not taught a simple 'Basic' Bengali? Their knowledge of English is as rudimentary as in the case of the Bengalis. Would we expect in Paris for instance a medium of English, Bengali, Hindi? It is true that textbooks are lacking in Bengali, but as soon as Bengali is established as



the medium, books would be forthcoming, perhaps in torrents.✓ Other objections are raised, but as a matter of course one cannot learn to swim without first taking to the waters. The initial daring shown by the National Council of Education must not be allowed to remain for ever a dream.

The materials of this Essay come mainly from three books :

1. *Golden Jubilee Volume of the National Council of Education*;
2. *Origin of the National Education Movement* by Haridas and Uma Mukherji;
3. *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1903–1908)* by Sumit Sarkar.

The arrangement and comments are of course my own.

## *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*

WITHIN THE last few months, Mr Nirad Chaudhuri's autobiography has earned a considerable reputation with readers here and abroad and the controversy between admirers and critics has resounded in many quarters. Naturally I could not resist the temptation of reading the volume twice from cover to cover. Undoubtedly this is in many ways a most remarkable book.

First of all, there is the glow in the author's language, its pleasant readability, the robustness in expression. Some think that the English of Mr Chaudhuri is not quite the English of today. Such criticism, I believe, is totally inappropriate. If a writer can reach out to his readers in his own way, in a sharp and clear manner, his style is thereby justified, however much it differs from the usual standards. Our author has indeed a distinctive style and he can touch his readers effectively, even overwhelm them.

We must also regard as extraordinary the impress of original thinking which marks this work. It has given out opinions fearlessly, not refraining from hitting fiercely at established conventions; it has great disdain for "patriotic" adulation and complacency, dragging into the light of day many abuses accumulated in our social life. Too often we deceive ourselves with self-praise and swim in the tide of "platitudes"; it is better therefore to respect the lashes of merciless criticism. Mr Chaudhuri is a master in not mere analysis, but in sheer description as well. I would like to mention in this connection three of his highly enjoyable chapters — "Torch Race of the Indian Renaissance", "Calcutta", and "Initiation into Scholarship".

Apart from characteristic language and ideas, the reader is attracted also by the revelation of the author's striking personality. To the western world, Mr Chaudhuri might indeed be "an unknown Indian"; but surely to the educated Bengalis, his learning, musical knowledge, military studies are not really unfamiliar. Yet, apart from the circle

of friends, readers who do not know him personally would now have the experience of an unique personality which cannot easily be shaken off. Personality arouse interest always, and draws to itself an unfailing public interest. If the object of an autobiography is the revelation of a self, the aim has been fully attained and a powerful intellect has been embodied in the written word.

Unfortunately, Mr Chaudhuri's objective is much more ambitious. He has proclaimed loudly that his book is not a string of the events of his life and that he is discussing not the experience of an individual but the history of his people. With infinite labour and effort, he is trying to emancipate us from the pall of ignorance. He lays down the claim that his opinions are firm conclusions, free from all error (pp. 129, 465, 466, 513).

But well-written, original and distinctive opinions do not necessarily thereby turn out to be firm truths. Truth is measured, not by an apparently dazzling display but by a conformity to the reality of things. Of course, differences of opinion are natural, perhaps unavoidable. But since our author has preferred verbal propaganda to factual proofs, the present critic is constrained to observe that Mr Chaudhuri's views are partial, one-sided and largely fanciful. The vindication of the *Autobiography* lies in its self-revelation, rather than in any establishment of significant historical conclusions.

The keynote of the entire volume is just this — the culture and civilisation of Bengal, nay India, our entire national life is on the downgrade, with no signs at all of any regeneration. Imitating Spengler's grim vision of Europe, our author sees in his own country only the dark shadow of decline and fall. Ruin is coming down on us, the ground is slipping under our feet, all that is precious faces destruction today (pp. 48, 129). We are living in an age of real decadence, manliness is at a discount, the ability to criticise has evaporated, signs of decay are advancing on all hands (pp. 334, 364, 444, 469). According to our author, this fall is not the departure of the modern world from some traditional golden age. The decadence in our society has revealed itself since only 1919, and Calcutta after 1930 has left him dissatisfied (pp. 259, 403). The blight which descended on Bengal even during Mr Chaudhuri's youth is but a feretaste of the recent resurgence of barbarism in modern India (pp. 186, 187). The decline in effect is only in the contrast with the 19th century "reawakening" which attained its full glory in the five decades after 1860 (p. 221).

Is not such an evaluation of the "renaissance" in the 19th century

an exaggerated picture? Recent discussions in Bengal have thrown much light on the drawbacks in the achievement of our middle classes in the British days. To raise our "awakening" under the imperialist auspices of a semi-colony, the stirrings of life under the wings of a permanent landlord settlement, to the level of the European renaissance is largely futile. Our renaissance was hindered at every step by its divorce from the masses, by Hindu-Muslim differences, by inherent contradictions. The portrait of a cultured Bengali gentleman which the author presents from the pages of Bankimchandra's *Rajani* provokes today a smile rather than respect. Can we find in it any signs of the defiant spirit in Europe of the 15th or the 16th century? Mr Chaudhuri, like our 19th century cultural leaders has equated the Indian Mutiny with traditional reaction. The virile side of the revolt, grasped by the vision of Marx, escapes his attention.

Of course, our renaissance, though not of equal status with the European, is the undeniable inspiration of our modern national life. Only we have to identify here culture with the thought currents of the educated gentle folk. Even as we accept the cultural heritage from Rammohun to Rabindranath, we cannot shut our eyes to its lack of strength, inner contradictions, limited extent, and excellence in only a partial way. If we ignore the limitations of our 19th century achievements, we are driven into the arms of certain platitudes.

Our author, in overemphasising the Bengal renaissance, has drawn a picture of recent decadence which again is partial and distorted. To hold that nothing new has lifted its head in India in the last generation is just propaganda, a mere assertion of faith. The mass-awakening under Gandhiji; the selfless death-daring campaign of the revolutionaries; the agitation of the workers and peasants; the popular struggle against imperialism — all seem to lie beyond Mr Chaudhuri's concept of culture and civilisation, all apparently are no more to him than signs of national degeneration. We find the author bowing down in respect to the strength of character in the educated gentry of the 19th century. By what arguments however can we ignore the struggle and effort of very many men in modern times? Do not our experiences reveal modern instances of sacrificing of self for the sake of ideals, the voluntary acceptance of suffering with endless courage, mutual cooperation, patient perseverance, building of organisational strength? Is the absence of all this so very obvious today? Mr Chaudhuri's experience may very well have escaped all such things, but then that is his own misfortune, not that of his people. And, if we equate cul-

ture with the walled-up kingdom of literature and thought alone — even then can we deny the development of Bengal's literature and India's thought in the last quarter-century? National culture is not synonymous with a few great names alone — it is expressed as well in the discussions on literature and art, science and history, in the emergence of new ideology.

Mr Chaudhuri has pointed out in his preface that his aim is to ascertain the general rule, not the exceptions to it. One may ask however whether what affects big chunks of the people is merely the exception, not the rule. We need not inflate the importance of much that has happened within the last two or three decades, but surely it is improper to pass over the recent manifestations of life and vitality in our country.

True, the scenes of mental, moral and practical decadence which have pained our author are largely present today. But does not this apply mainly to certain strata and classes, and not to the people as a whole? Mr Chaudhuri has confined his gaze to the upper stratum of society. Had he extended his vision like a true humanist, he would have observed that the decline of certain categories is not equivalent with the fall of the entire nation. But then this raises the question of a point of view, of different ways of looking at history.

Mr Chaudhuri's contempt and distaste for the crowd is significant. Not merely does he dislike the concourse of people (p. 260). In early youth he dreamed of the revolution in terms of a disciplined military rising, not as a people's upsurge (p. 249). He was even offended with the popular outbursts of the Gandhian era (p. 407). He did master the history of the French Revolution in his student days, but it seems that like some traditional historians the masses appear to him as mere *canaille*. It is not merely a matter of personal preference; Mr Chaudhuri brings this point of view in his history as well.

Our author proclaims the ideal of sticking to facts as the appropriate point of view in history. But he does not seem to be aware that the pursuit of truth is not something which is always the selection of the same kind of acts, that an ideal is not some abstract invariable concept. He seems to suggest that the Greek historian Thucydides was above all national or party spirit (p. 345), or that Bishop Stubbs was untouched by any partisan feeling (p. 351). No historian today would assert such claims. No one today would bow down to the arrogance of the French historian quoted more than once by Mr Chaudhuri, who said that history itself spoke through him. Mr

Chaudhuri accepts the claim of some historians to have reached final truth, irrespective of country, period or class. But the claim itself is a mere reflex of a special set of conditions in the 19th century, when it was held that the state was above all group or class, and that intellectual pursuit was an eternal process unaffected by social environment. One need not disown the objective scientific approach to history, but the particular judgement of any historian is of course subject to challenge.

Mr Chaudhuri's historical conclusions must therefore submit to objective analysis. He has emphasised the influence of the anti-Islamic crusade behind Europe's expansion (p. 506); the much more powerful economic impulse which drew Europeans to America, which lay outside the pale of Islam, remains ignored. Echoing Spengler, Mr Chaudhuri apprehends that the entire European civilisation is on the brink of ruin (p. 341); the tide of vitality apparent today in so many parts of Europe escapes attention, for the bulk of Eurasia is alleged to have strayed from the truth — and this is a sample of the author's objective historical judgement. A "genius" like Churchill, appearing after the First World War, might have crushed the Indian national movement for ever (p. 320)! And, our only hope of survival in the future lies in revolving round the American sun (p. 510)! It is easy enough to understand the hopes and fears of an individual or a group. It is quite another thing to indulge in such wishful thinking as illustrations of objective historical analysis.

Misleading comments on our own history as well are not lacking. Mr Chaudhuri has assumed (p. 409) that the Hindu sense of community is a synonym for our national consciousness; by the same argument medieval Christian entity may be claimed to be the same thing as European nationalism. The Hindu public, it seems, regards gods and goddesses as within the range of bribes from humans (p. 450); is it not possible to bring the same charge against the mundane functioning of all religions? Hindu-Muslim antagonism seems natural to our author and he considers the "two-nations" theory as a historic fact (p. 231); but how can this be reconciled with his protest against the recent partition of Bengal as an unjust and unnatural measure? The national sentiment in the days of our renaissance appears reasonable and liberal to him, and yet he regards Gandhism as ancient reaction and a heap of superstitions (pp. 435, 441) which ruined the delicate breadth of vision in the former; he has missed the clear inner connection between the two ages representing only two

phases in the evolution of our middle class. Again and again we come across such recourses to individual fancies and subjective beliefs parading under the banner of a broad scientific devotion to facts.

In Mr Chaudhuri's history, our renaissance has been over-exalted; the recent decadence of certain groups has been transformed into a fall of the entire nation; socialist thought and action in modern Europe has been totally ignored; and our own social evolution has assumed a most curious form. In the last chapter of the volume, he presents an original interpretation of the stream of Indian history, apparently in the footsteps of Toynbee this time.

Toynbee sought the difference between the diverse historical societies in the distinctions between primarily religious cultures. The European middle ages and modern times thus assume in his mind the shape of a single West-European Christian entity. His aim was to trace general formula governing the rise and fall of the specific societies. Mr Chaudhuri likewise detects three connected yet distinct "religious" civilisations in Indian history — Hindu, Islamic and European. They play their parts on the Indian stage, but the origin of each lies in an external upheaval — the Aryan conquests, the march of Islam, the European imperial expansion respectively. Thus, the impulse behind and the governing force in each of the three successive civilisations in India lay in a wider foreign culture. Sanskrit, Persian and English were the cultural vehicles of the three successive stages. From a purely cultural angle, the three civilisations in India have followed a downward path, but in the matter of political organisation, they have moved upwards. Yet in essence and nature, each of the three is not merely of alien origin but intrinsically foreign. The carriers of each civilisation were the foreign rulers and their companions and associates. The vast majority of the inhabitants could not assimilate the civilisation of their time, resulting in a constant strife between culture and barbarism. The barbarians are evidently the common multitude, the "internal proletariat" of Toynbee. Time has ruined each civilisation in turn — partly through the merciless pressure of the country's climate and environment, in part through the weariness and loss of strength of the alien creators. The fall has not been engineered by the "barbarian" multitude, for relatively to the leaders of culture, the common folk are always inferior, and the country's very atmosphere renders them more and more lifeless. Of course wherever a crisis threatens a civilisation, the ordinary people create much noise, but such disorders are like the braying of asses in lions' skins. Resurgence

of civilisation can come only through the intervention of another foreign culture. The pattern of Indian history is roughly this in our author's view.

The attraction of a pattern lies in the ease with which it permits a sketch after one's own heart. Facts which do not fit in can simply be ignored, rendering the scrutiny of contradictory facts redundant. Our author thus dismisses out of court the very possibility of the origin of Indian civilisation in the interaction between external influence and internal conditions. The Aryan migration occurred in many lands; it is no small wonder that Mr Chaudhuri's Hindu civilisation is branded as alien, while to Toynbee the Aryan impact ceases to be a foreign entity in the so-called Hellenic, West European, East European or Iranian societies. It is indeed startling to hold that the Vedic and the subsequent Hindu cultures, literatures, cults, philosophies, languages — all originated in an impact from outside, while their relation with the soil and the people of the land continued to be merely that of conflict. Mr Chaudhuri has not explained what foreign impact led to the entire culture of Buddhism. The external impulses in his theory remind us of the First Cause in an explanation of the universe. In point of fact, however, the Indo-Aryan society's dependence on the external world was most tenuous. The links in Islamic India with religion and law abroad are more apparent, but even Toynbee has refrained from lumping all Muslim communities in one single Islamic society. If we find the true determinants of medieval Indian civilisation in pure Islamic religion, language, or social practice, there would remain no necessity to distinguish India of that epoch from its contemporary Middle East or from North Africa or South-East Europe. To dismiss in this fashion the medieval co-existence in India of the Hindu and Muslim religions, and their mutual influence, is passing strange.

The concept of an Indian civilisation covering Hindu and Muslim periods alike and its natural evolution in time is certainly not weaker in any way to our author's dictum about two specifically different societies — Hindu and Muslim. The way of life of the masses, the village organisation, the social structure remained indeed largely the same throughout the ages. Again, if we admit that big economic changes may transform the shape of society, we are justified in supposing that the age-old Indian society was breaking down under the pressure of British rule, leading to the beginning of a new Indian society and culture. Mr Chaudhuri's doctrine of the three distinct suc-



cessive civilisations in India may then turn out to be a mere *tour de force*.

It seems however that the interpretation of Indian history is after all a subsidiary matter in this book. It rises from a wish to clothe in scientific form an intense subjective emotion. The author in his search after a viable ideal in his early youth linked himself with a specific thought-world, the component native element in which was a coloured vision of the awakening in Bengal, while its foreign counterpart and framework happened to lie in an old partial view of European culture. That world has been almost shattered by the hard impact of historic reality — the exponents of our renaissance are exhausted and depressed today, and familiar Europe has been thrown into turmoil by the advent of newer ideas. A sense of *fin de siècle* has overtaken our author. Since the common people appear to Mr Chaudhuri to be no more than an ignorant barbaric multitude, he finds no ray of hope in either India or Europe. It is only in capitalist America therefore that he finds inevitably the vital spirit which fits in with his own pre-conceptions. He seems thus to wait for American capitalism to step in, perhaps as the only hope for India's rejuvenation. And this is the perspective in which is built up his philosophy of history. If we can ascribe the impetus behind all civilisation in India to some foreign source, it might even seem natural to look to the coming of America as the saviour. Yet, America is after all the child of European civilisation. Consequently the author is constrained to admit that in reality the third or Indo-European civilisation is still not quite exhausted; we are witnessing as it were an ebb and flow within its limits. Our lost health will possibly revive through an American injection. All hope need not be given up.

No one will grudge Mr Chaudhuri seeking his own consolation. But the path of history is indeed devious. And in all probability, his firm conclusions will break down in the process of its unfolding.

## *Problems of Indian Historiography*

We meet today under the shadow of gloom cast by the death of Professor Mohammad Habib and pay our tribute of respect to his memory.

It is customary for a newly-elected president to express his own unworthiness before the assembly he is going to address. In my case, it will be not merely the observance of a ritualistic convention, for I have been astonished beyond measure by the summons which has called me up from my seclusion and I still fail to understand the reason for this year's totally unexpected choice by the authorities of the Indian History Congress. I have never been intimately connected with the Congress; though I happened to be one of its local secretaries as early as 1939, I have so far attended only three sessions in the course of a whole generation. My bare half-a-dozen research papers on 18th century British Indian records were published as far back as the thirties and have by now, I suppose, reached oblivion. In the fifties I took part in editing four historical volumes which attracted little attention. Of course I have written scores of historical reviews and articles, but mostly in my own language unfamiliar to the majority in the world of scholarship. I have been fairly successful as a teacher for four decades, but I did not know that this is any claim to the chair of a gathering like this.

Indeed the only reason for the great distinction brought to me seems to be the love and affection of my young friends and pupils who must have persuaded the others to whom I have been an outsider. Whatever the explanation might be, my heartfelt thanks go out to the executive and members of the Indian History Congress, and I assure you that the honour at the fag-end of my life has indeed been overwhelming. I can only hope that the experiment will not be a dismal failure.

The venue of our session, Muzaffarpur, recalls to me pleasant memories of the second decade of the century when I stayed here off and on with my father, a government officer. A little dreamy town nestling on the river bank with bungalows, bits of crowded areas, orchards and open spaces must have in the fifty years since grown into a veritable city which has today even a university centred on it. My links with Bihar are strong, our family was domiciled here; it was in Patna that my elder brother lived, taught, and died. I am glad to know that Bihar today is a promising nursery of young historians.

I regret I have been extremely unwell for the last few months, and thus prevented from concentrating on my task and writing something worthy of the occasion. It has been beyond my strength to survey the recent literature,

to present any study in depth, to examine adequately some current approach. In particular, I must apologise to the younger historians for not coming out, as some of them might have expected, with a Marxian critique of Indian history or any part of it. I have never felt myself competent to offer such a review, and indeed our evidence (and perhaps our mastery of Marxism) is still insufficient for the purpose. Marxian historical studies are also not that plentiful and comprehensive even in other lands. And though the Marxian approach does peep out today in very many historical writings, sometimes it takes on a dogmatic form against which we have to guard for the sake of scientific Marxism itself.

I crave your indulgence for holding up here a mere string of stray random thoughts, with no higher aim than sharing views, raising questions, encouraging rethinking, criticising assumptions. In a sense, this is no unworthy aim. History after all is a search after truth, an approximation rather than a final formulation. One of its main objects is to rouse intellectual curiosity. "History is a science still in travail", said Marc Bloch, "It is a thing in movement." He added: "The incomplete, if it is perpetually straining to realise itself, is quite as enticing as the most perfect success."

## I

FOR SOME years now attempts at a logical periodisation of Indian history have become noticeable. This is a worthwhile endeavour, but have we really succeeded? Is there an agreed scheme, and are there reasons valid enough to sustain it?

In our innocent younger days, Indian history was divided neatly into the Hindu, Muslim and British periods. This was a simple political division, implying the predominance in each period of the corresponding set of rules. Predominance, not exclusive rule — for the Hindu period contained certain non-Hindu chiefs, the Muslim epoch covered a number of Hindu states and the first European settlements, and the British sway did not exclude the 'native' princely India.

As we grew older and wiser, the traditional division appeared more and more unscientific. Can periodisation, we asked, follow simple political, even communal, labels? Are not the real dividing lines in the history of a country based rather on social and material evolution, independent of the accidents of the race or religion of the rulers? We therefore turned, perhaps naturally, to the established nomenclature in European history — ancient, medieval, modern.

There was a consequent difficulty. The three-fold division in Europe has a firm solidity. Ancient Europe was conterminous with the classical Graeco-Roman culture and marked by the rise, growth and decay of the truest slave society in the annals of civilisation. Medieval Europe was the story of the domination of the Catholic Christian

Church accompanied by the origin, ascendancy and decline of feudal society. Modern Europe was ushered in by the series of great transitional changes like the Renaissance, the Reformation, or Europe's discovery of the world, along with the advent, flowering and decadence of capitalist society. Is there any comparable parallel in the stages of our history? Do the European terms convey in the Indian context similar connotations?

Of course, any history can be divided for convenience into ancient, medieval and modern — implying thereby nothing more than antiquity, an intervening period and modernity, in a purely relative sense. But do the classic terms indicate for India no real material-social entities?

Confusion is increased by our prevalent usage. In olden times, the Hindu period was supposed to extend from the earliest days to the end of the 12th century, the Muslim from that point to mid-18th century, and the British section started from this stage. We have not materially departed from these limits. A reference to the list of papers at our last session, grouped into the three main sections, will bear out the contention that the present dividing lines tend to coincide with the period limits of old tradition. But are there any scientific reasons for equating ancient India with the Hindu period, our middle ages with Muslim rule, and our modern history with British sway? Why have we then abandoned the old names?

Some have postulated in our earliest history a period of the Asiatic mode of production. But the reality of its concrete existence in India and its possible duration remain matters of sharp difference of opinion. Most scholars are now agreed that there was no true slave society in Indian antiquity. Slavery existed to some extent in some areas for some time, as it continued to do even in much later epochs. But slave labour was never here the main prop of production, which is the essential mark of a slave society. Historians like D. D. Kosambi and Ram Saran Sharma have sketched the rise of feudalism in India and the probable dates assigned to the rise are from the third to the eighth century which surely fall well without our usual limits for Ancient, not Medieval, India. And when did feudalism in our land pass away, if even now? Irfan Habib once told us that there is no sense in regarding Mughal India as feudal. Yet in recent 'modern' times, have we not often supposed that we were still under the shadow of at least a good deal of feudalism? What then was the exact reality of Indian feudalism, and what its limiting lines? And again, what are our

approximate dates for capitalism in India? Bipan Chandra's date for the commencement of our modernism, of India's gradual integration into the capitalist world in a subordinate colonial position, seems to be roughly mid-18th century. But this coincides with the advent of the British power, and is it not a direct consequence of British conquest?

Of course one can argue that terms like feudalism or capitalism do not cover at any time the entirety of the Indian scene, but are mere regional phases. Or, it can be maintained that the succession of dominant societies we see in Europe has not been repeated in India, that the western social models have often managed to coexist in our land. What then would remain of the successive material realities behind the three-fold division of Indian history into ancient, medieval and modern? And why do we still stick at the date-lines appropriate to the Hindu-Muslim-British periods to mark our new periodisation?

It is far from my intention to suggest a return to the traditional political periods of the past. I am merely pointing out the necessity of rethinking and thinking out appropriate and logically acceptable limits for the divisions we impose on our history. At present, I am afraid, we have only coined new high-sounding but misleading names for the three traditional periods of the past.

In this connection, has not the time come yet for devising additional sections in our Congress? Already we have a fourth section — on external non-Indian history. It is only proper to have a Pre-History Section in view of the rapidly extending evidences on our earliest times. And surely there is a case for a section on Post-British Independent India; foreign scholars at any rate are already working away at our contemporary history. Pre-History and Contemporary India may perhaps be still subsumed under our ancient and modern departments. But what about today's Pakistan? Do we regard it as forming part of our modern India, or do we relegate it to our non-Indian external section?

May I venture here on perhaps an irrelevant, if not impertinent thought? The History Congress still seems to many as one of the annual 'tamashas' in which we have been so prolific. Can it not be turned into something more active throughout the year? One way would be to organise groups of local members, perhaps in each university centre, with regular discussion meetings of their own and periodic reports to the centre. The membership dues may then be lowered, if the numbers rise as a result. Those attending the annual

session would perhaps have to pay more for the privilege, a delegate fee over and above the membership dues.

## II

As a fashion perhaps, the study of Indian history begins normally with an assertion of India's fundamental unity, and a review of the available source-material.

What exactly is 'fundamental' in India's unity?

One can hardly speak of a national unity in the Indian past; nationhood, as in some other lands, is a recent phenomenon with us; it may be claimed that it is still in the making; it may even be argued that India is a congeries of nationalities with separate histories of their own; such nationalities may even go their separate ways in the future, however unfortunate this might be for our legitimate hopes of well-being, strength and advancement. Racial uniformity was never characteristic of India; multiplicity of races has marked the course of our annals. It could not be denied that political-administrative unification as a recent development and not a general feature of Indian history; the mighty empires which arose never unified the whole of what we know as India; their control over the entire land must have been uneven and incomplete; we often loosely assume that the Maurya, Gupta or the Mughal imperial power exercised the central authority familiar to us today. A common language hardly existed; the sway of any dominant priestly or court language could not have penetrated to the masses at large who made up the Indian people and clung to their own vernacular languages. Geographical entity is a relative and even elusive term; on the one hand, many lands taken usually as historical units do not possess such unity, just as natural boundaries for a country are naturally not quite common; on the other hand, geographical unity may easily cover a continental or subcontinental region the subdivisions of which can easily count as separate distinctive units in history by their own rights. Are we then driven to the position that the fundamental unity is only a historical convention, convenient and unavoidable perhaps but not objectively true?

The usual answer of course is that our unity is essentially cultural. This requires close thinking and analysis. Was our unity in the past then rooted in Hinduism, as medieval Europe was the unity of Christendom? Apart from the difficulty of defining Hinduism throughout the centuries and the existence of considerable groups of non-Hindus in ancient India, how was this religious unity of old affected by the

advent, spread and persistence of Islam in our country? Would we have to fall back on the two-nation theory, or should we claim that the Muslims were assimilated into Hindu India or, conversely, they were never a part of India at all? Does the recent emergence of Pakistan imply a modification of the thesis of our fundamental unity? How can we, again, uphold India's essential unity today and tomorrow on Hindu culture alone and indeed on any particular religion, since secularism is our proclaimed ideal? And if we turn to the concept of class-culture, how can we base in any period at all a fundamental unity on religion?

Would it be permissible to go so far as to say that the idea of the fundamental unity of India is not a closed static absolute notion, equally true in every period, independent of subjective approaches? Historical thinking, if it existed in our past, would surely have thought of unity in terms of a dynasty, locality, religious culture and community, or a common way of life round a religious outlook of course. Today we think of it in dynamic terms of a developing nation which is surely the heir of the past, but which is also in the process of realising itself, with perhaps an uncertain future as yet. Reality indeed is so baffling that many accepted concepts cannot capture it effectively.

The source-material for any particular history is however very much an objective factor, free from theoretical speculation. Comments here can only clarify the scope of the subject and emphasise certain approaches to it.

There was a time when our historians concentrated on official records — Hindu inscriptions, Muslim court-chronicles, British archives. I still remember the day when young researchers were discouraged from entering on wider fields. But such governmental or semigovernmental documents are not enough; one must learn to follow other traces as well of man's activity, to harness multiple types of source-material. "The variety of historical evidence is nearly infinite." "The deeper the research, the more the light of the evidence must converge from sources of many different kinds." Thus Marc Bloch, whom I have just quoted, utilised in his medieval studies place names, nature of the soil, technique of cultivation, forms of settlement, old maps, modern aerial surveys, ancient tools, folk-lore, social ideas, social relations, economic formations — in addition to the available direct documents.

Apart from the sweeping search for such materials in every possible direction, the historian has to grapple with his source in a truly penetrating fashion. For, we do not observe the past directly but only

through the reports of the others who again can see only a part of the truth. To quote Bloch again, no witness is reliable in "the absolute sense", no document can be "equally reliable on all subjects". We very often only paraphrase our documents, while what is necessary is a "struggle" with them. "A document is a witness, and like most witnesses it does not talk unless it is questioned." We must know what questions to ask, as in a cross-examination, and remember that often enough unintentional indirect admissions are more valuable than the avowed testimony of the witness or the document.

Two difficulties about sources harass the Indian historian in a special degree. Our early literary writings are of uncertain date, and even the *Arthashastra*, I think, is suspect. Yet without a firm, at least a fairly certain approximate dating, their historical value is impaired. Chronology is the essential skeleton of any frame of history. We cannot jump about in effect from century to century haphazardly in the presentation of any development. What is meant by chronology in this context is not the exact dating but a certainty about the sequence of the literary records in the stream of time. Otherwise we are left hanging in the mid-air as it were. Can anything be done by the collective efforts of scholarly institutions, so that the individual writer may use the relevant material with greater assurance? The second handicap I am thinking of is the notorious lack of preservation of relatively modern newspapers, journals, private papers, letters, etc. together with the apathy of the authorities towards the collection, housing, maintenance, micro-filming and so forth. Is it not almost criminal to allow historical materials to perish, adding thereby to the difficulties of posterity?

### III

Within the domain of Ancient Indian History, a good deal of attention has recently been drawn by the concept of the Asiatic society and the problem of Indian feudalism. I am not competent to deal authoritatively with either, but a few points do occur to any thinking mind.

Do we always remember that, contrary to popular Marxism, Marx himself did not give a categorical final answer to the question as to what are the different social formations which can be identified in history? What was fundamental in his conception was the passage from the primitive classless society to civilised class-society and the motion thence towards a civilised classless society of the future. The actual stages or formations within class-society have however to be



determined concretely. Thus in the forties of the last century, Marx inclined to postulate only three broad types of class-society. In the fifties, he brought forward the idea of an additional mode of production — the Asiatic — an argument for the possible plurality of passages in class-society from the original primitivism, instead of a unilateral ladder of progress. The simplistic formula — primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism — must be explained as a propagandist popularisation only, emphasising the concept of the succession of social formations brought about by changes in the mode of production. We know that Marx and Engels themselves went on exploring the possibilities of variations to the last, like true social scientists.

The Asiatic society is not characterised chiefly by the absence of property in land and by centralised public works and irrigation as the 1853 articles on India by Marx suggested and as Wittfogel recently elaborated. In the *Formen* (1857-58), Marx emphasises rather “the self-sustaining unity of manufacture and agriculture” within the village community, explaining in this way the long duration of relative rural self-sufficiency. The rural authority may be “more despotic or more democratic according to circumstances, thereby dispensing with oriental despotism as a universal necessity. The “all-embracing unity from above appears as the higher or sole proprietor, the real communities only as hereditary possessors”, thus not absolutely ruling out private landed property of some kind. Cities were “mere locations for external trade, or princely camps”, proving consequently some amount of mercantile activity and aristocratic expenses.

Can a society with such broad characteristics be entirely ruled out for Ancient India? If so, why? Early British authorities did stress the existence of somewhat similar village communities, at least in a good many regions.

Are not terms like the Asiatic mode of production, again, merely generalised abstract models which at any given point may not exactly conform to an existing social formation? Is it not difficult to make even the more familiar and much more generally accepted feudal model coincide concretely with an actual society supposedly illustrating it? Ideal models are never reproduced in life meticulously, and yet it is difficult to discard them.

Does the Asiatic mode assert total changelessness, which of course is unreal even in the old Indian context? What the concept really indicated was rather a built-in resistance to change in the village com-

munities, and a consequent slowness in the pace of development. This is not the denial of any change at all, of possible change within a tradition, as Diptendra Bandyopadhyay pointed out in his study last year. Here we have an illustration of the well-known theory of uneven development, involving slow or quick change depending on objective material factors. Absolute changelessness is surely absurd in dialectical Marxism, but change is always relative.

Will not the total rejection of the Asiatic mode drive us to the substitute of 'Asiatic feudalism', since a true slave society did not materialise in India? This is the famous 'dilation' of the feudal idea, once popular in Soviet historiography, which leads to the application of the same label to all non-slave, non-capitalist class-societies from backward Africa to pre-revolutionary France. Would this 'dilated' feudalism be an improvement on the hypothesis of an Asiatic mode in India, flexible with concrete variations of course and slow-motion changes thrown in?

There is of course another way out of the difficulty. We may deny the universality of what is supposed to be the official Marxian pattern — primitive society, slavery, feudalism, capitalism (Irfan Habib's P.S.F.C.) — with the supposition that the Asiatic mode was only a passing phase in Marx's thought. Released from the 'universal chain of succession', the historian may then concentrate on concrete class struggles, plentiful enough in Indian history, without bothering about changing social models. This is however too easy a way out, at least for Marxians. The *Critique* of 1859 did present a picture in which at a certain stage of development production relations turn into fetters on productive forces and usher in a social revolution. Would not the assumption of a mere succession of class struggles without any climax, successive doses of exploitation and nothing more, tend to disown the fundamental Marxian concept above and make history go round and round the mulberry bush without any direction of progressive change?

As distinct from the nebulous Asiatic modes, feudalism is now a well-established concept in Indian history. Still, two questions persist. What are the limiting dates for our feudal times? And what was the distinctive nature of Indian feudalism?

Authoritative scholars trace the rise of our feudalism from the 3rd century, culminating round about the 8th. The question which crops up inevitably is how to characterise Indian society before the 3rd century, which I suppose was also a class society for a long stretch. What were the new 'feudal' characteristics coming in? Was the change in the structure of the village community so drastic as to mark a new

type of society? Was a class of intermediaries tending towards landlordship below the state power an essentially new factor? Can we be absolutely sure that no similar intermediaries existed in the past, even in an inchoate form? Are the available land-charters, for the benefit mostly of the reviving priesthood, an entirely new arrangement, or are they the earliest to survive? Could the state control, of the Mauryas for instance, have been so complete as to dispense with all intermediaries? Were the so-called bureaucrats paid fully in money with no hold on the local produce? Can the *Arthashastra* be taken as a literal picture for an entire epoch over a vast area? Was our feudalism a countrywide phenomenon? How long did it persist? Was the Muslim period feudal, and if not, what was it? Did the British encounter feudalism in India? And when did our feudalism actually pass away? You will see that any fool may ask any number of questions, which may still be difficult to answer.

As common traits of feudalism, distinct from the specific regional features, Marc Bloch mentioned — a dependent peasantry, slackened socio-economic intercourse, sluggish money circulation, regional mentality. The first of these four features is too wide, applicable perhaps to other societies as well; the other three are at best relative terms. Negatively, Bloch warned us that weak central authority, brutal exercise of power, administrative decentralisation, encroachment on government by aristocratic landlords are not necessarily feudalism. Obviously, therefore, much clarification is still needed about the concept of feudalism itself in India and even abroad.

Certainly my object is not to throw overboard the concept of Indian feudalism, just as I do not dismiss even the Asiatic mode in the Indian context. I am merely arguing for incisively clear, perhaps collective, sustained thinking on such controversial issues. In particular, one must be conscious that abstract social models are necessary for clarity of understanding, yet they are different from the actual concrete specific conditions at any given time or place.

#### IV

Passing to our Muslim Middle Ages, I shall draw your attention to two problems. Firstly, Hindu-Muslim relations. What was the general nature of Muslim rule in India? And what was the attitude of one community towards the other?

Many eminent Hindu scholars have inclined to the view that the Muslim rule was essentially a foreign government over us like the

British. Some nationalists thus talk of seven centuries of foreign domination in India. But how do we characterise a foreign subjection?

Did the Indian Mussulmans, settled here, have any other country of their own? Did they send out their plunder abroad? Was the policy of Muslim rulers governed by the interests of any foreign country? Were not large numbers in our population coreligionists of our Muslim kings? True, very many Muslim adventurers were of foreign extraction; but did they not in overwhelming numbers make India their new home? True, Islam arose outside India and had universalist aims; but in the similar case of Christianity's relation to Europe, do we think of a foreign subjection? Many Muslims felt contempt for the 'kafirs'; but did not our Aryans cherish similar sentiments towards the original Indians? And, how did our own Brahmins look on the Sudras?

The truth of our matter is that we cannot shake off the traditional equation — Indian culture = Hindu culture — the equation which has brought and still brings misfortune to us, in the wake of historical misunderstanding.

It has been argued that the foreignness of Muslim rule is proved by the perpetual oppression over the Hindus. As if native rulers, as distinct from foreigners, do not go in for prolonged oppression, and as if Hindu government also did not mean exploitation of the masses. And can it be said that interference with religion is the sole or the major proof of oppression?

Was Hindu-Muslim relationship a perpetual antagonism? Clinging to such a conception, some Hindu historians have even found the two-nation theory realistic.

Some well-meaning thinkers go to the other extreme of denying Hindu-Muslim differences. This surely is a wrong reading of the situation. The differences are real enough, and have persisted through centuries. They have often led to clashes, and it is puerile to attribute such in modern times to British intrigues alone. Tagore was right to point out that even Satan cannot obtain a foothold unless there is already an opening, a chink in the body-politic.

But are differences, even occasional clashes, identical with perpetual antagonism? Conflicts may flare up in certain regions, for a certain time. But they would also die down. Amity between the two communities might, and did, prevail for long, perhaps even for greater periods and larger areas. Under the pressure of common economic interests, antagonism would fade out time and again, and even the differences might retire backstage. There might be co-operation between the two

communities at very many levels. There was sure to be much cultural interaction. Theological and priestly fulminations would often be ignored for reasons of wiser statecraft. Is this not a truer picture than a perpetual Hindu-Muslim warfare, a perennial Muslim oppression, a permanent unbridgeable cleavage in the Indian population?

I shall merely touch upon the second problem which occurred to me. The recent researches of Irfan Habib and other scholars are focusing attention on technological developments of the Sultanate and Mughal epochs. Have these changes a bearing on any transition in our land from medievalism to modernity?

Obviously, mere technological progress is not enough for a social transformation, as contemporary events amply demonstrate. The celebrated Chinese inventions did not after all usher in a new social order in China. A technological change may again have a limited zone of operation, leaving wider areas unaffected, if economic activity continues to be regional. In our pre-modern society, innovations could very well be hedged in, as our researchers themselves have pointed out, by the forces of resistance, and old modes of production were not exhausted yet. After all, the historic transition from medieval to modern Europe was not primarily a technological revolution, but due to fundamental socio-economic changes in a rare formidable combination. In the Marxian theory of social change, the ripening productive forces are surly not mere technological changes by themselves.

## V

In the field of Modern India, I shall recapitulate a few points on the two topics about which I happen to have already written fairly extensively — 19th century renaissance and the freedom movement.

✓ The term 'renaissance' has often been challenged in our Indian setting. It is easy to argue that the European prototype of our awakening was a far wider and much more many-sided resurgence and that our movement had no such sweep, vitality or capacity to remake the world around. The political frame was also different, and instead of free and independent states we had to work out our intellectual-cultural revival within the strict limits of a foreign semicolonial subjection.

But is this difference sufficient to negate the concept of a renaissance in our land? After all, the European counterpart had its own blemishes. And awakening is always a relative term. Can we say honestly that our 18th century was not culturally a stagnant backwater from which we did manage to come out and escape in the 19th? If un-

critical adulation is wrong in history, is not a contemptuous rejection also unjustified?

The undoubted limitations of our 19th century 'awakening' lay in three directions: the failure of the educated community to understand the exploiting character of the alien British rule; the gulf between the 'illuminated' *bhadralok* and the toiling masses who lived in a world apart; and the obsession with Hindu traditions which helped to keep the men of our renaissance aloof from the Muslims. Quite apart from such limitations, however, our movement had a reality of its own, an impact on the country, a real contribution to make to modern Indian culture.

Was the 19th century awakening exclusive to Bengal? I am afraid scholars have paid too little attention to the intellectual-cultural life of other metropolitan areas like Bombay and Madras, and consequently our knowledge is imperfect. Bengal's pre-eminence, again, was merely an earlier start due to the greater consolidation of the British influence, its deeper penetration and its wider orbit in these parts, for the European impact was indeed a driving force behind our awakening.

Was our renaissance then largely of foreign inspiration? Patriotic sentiment would like of course to trace it to a revival of our own ancient heritage, like the renewal of the classical culture in the European movement. Recently David Kopf has inclined to the hypothesis that the origin of our renaissance was integrally connected with the orientalist activity of foreign scholars no doubt but working after all on the glorious Indian material. This is hardly convincing, and I think the true impulse lay not in a 'rediscovery' of the remote past, but the 'discovery' of the recent new which implied English education, western science, the liberal rational thought of Europe. This was in effect the opening of a closed door. Despite the sophisticated thinking of our later 19th century, this debt to the West was freely recognised by most of the Bengal renaissance.

Thus Rammohun Roy argued staunchly that contradictory religious texts have to be reconciled by our reasoning. He based his own interpretations of religion on the very modern concepts of social comfort, compassion, social texture — pointing irresistibly towards western rational humanism. When Rammohun or Vidyasagar quoted Hindu scriptures in defence of their projected reforms, their approach was clearly selective and the obvious original model was western liberalism. The Derozians openly flaunted the banner of western radicalism. Tagore wrote: "A wave of new ideas has come from

Europe and it has naturally had an impact on our minds. To deny that the resultant unrest has awakened our souls is to libel our spiritual faculties." And again, "it was the magic touch of western culture that roused Bengal from its torpor."

Was our renaissance a homogeneous united forward movement involving a series of intellectual efforts all of which command our equal pride? I have argued elsewhere about an inner clash and tension which I tried to present as a parallel to the celebrated differences in 19th century Russia between the westerners and the Slavophiles. In our case, literary excellence and patriotic fervour were common to both trends, but they were sharply divided on broad social issues. Our westerners stood for social reform, a rationalism on western lines, humanism of a European type. The traditionalists evoked the 'native' pride in ancient glories, the consciousness of Hindu superiority, emotional religious faith.

The two conflicting trends did not however divide the men of our renaissance into two water-tight camps, for the two rival tendencies might appear in the same person. What is implied in the distinction is merely the existence of two abstract types of thinking, two logical concepts battling over the minds of men. An individual might oscillate from pole to pole, but the two clashing concepts were logically opposed and could not be reconciled in any 'synthesis'. What appeared in very many individuals was not synthesis but 'an interpenetration of opposites', natural perhaps but hardly a logical resolution of the historic difference in approach between the two outlooks. The problem of priority is evaded in such a compromise as in all vaunted synthesis between faith and reason.

I still maintain that liberal westernism played historically a more significant role in our renaissance than traditional orientalism. Apart from being the real new impulse in the awakening, westernism is more akin to the future India of our dreams, though in today's battle over the shape of India's destiny, conservatism is still waging a stubborn rearguard action.

In passing, I would like to draw attention to areas in our 19th century cultural life still awaiting intensive study. Random examples would be — European journalism in relation to our educated people; the world of the Indian Christians; the social and intellectual life of the Muslims; the role of the Brahmos in the 'awakening'; the evaluation of the essential outlook of Bankimchandra and Vivekananda; and the extent of the renaissance in the district areas.

I would now turn to a few problems in the history of our freedom movement.

Did not the British rule in India, contrary to earlier beliefs and official propaganda, come to encounter a whole series of popular resistance mainly in the countryside? The evidence is embedded in official records themselves, focused only in recent years by historians like S. B. Chaudhuri. The government theory was of course that the disturbances were sporadic and fomented by disgruntled dispossessed persons, leaving unanswered of course the query as to where such leaders found their followers and why. It would perhaps be too much to claim that these peasant troubles were precursors of our freedom struggle; but, negatively, do they not prove that, contrary to the British view, British rule was not automatically accepted as a providential blessing by large chunks of our common people? The widespread popular resistance to local oppressors, often enough British proteges themselves, incidentally raises it to a higher level than the wars of the country powers against the British intruders waged on the lines of traditional power politics.

The revolt of 1857 had obviously a still higher status. Inevitably it raises three crucial questions which I discussed in the centenary year. Was the revolt of 1857–58 a popular uprising which transcended the military ‘mutiny’? Can the movement be regarded as a national struggle? Was the social content of the upheaval a mere feudal reaction?

Is the view that the popular participation was essentially an outburst of anarchy let loose by the mutinous soldiery anything but a characterisation which can be applied to all popular revolts? The evidence clearly demonstrates the breadth and the depth of the resistance of the common people over an extended area — “the general nature of the rebellion” which led the British to a policy of terrorisation of the countryside, inspiring in its turn sullen silence, non-cooperation and hatred on the part of the villagers. “Natives of India do not really like us”, Bishop Heber had shrewdly confessed before, “and — if a fair opportunity be offered — would gladly avail themselves of it to rise against us.”

Does not the denial of the national label to the upheaval of 1857–58 imply a peculiarly narrow interpretation of the term ‘national’? The national ideal does go on changing from period to period. An all-India nation-state or a liberal democratic republic might very well have been beyond the grasp of 1857, but such a rigid conception of nationalism (countrywide unity or representative government) would



lead us to deny the label to ever so many revolts in western history which have always been regarded as national. A far-flung popular struggle for liberation from alien rule, a more or less unified struggle commanding the sympathy of large masses of the population, has undeniable claims to be regarded as national. Our historians are experts in detecting national manifestations in ever so many chapters of our older history. Confronted with the elemental upsurge of 1857, they lose their nerve and turn their back on the possibility.

But was not 1857-58, after all, "the dying groans of an obsolete aristocracy and centrifugal feudalism of the medieval age?" Was it not "a counter-revolution"? Events in 1857 could not very well shake off all feudal ideas of the time, but why should we equate 'feudal' with 'reactionary' at every point in the past? Our traditional culture about which we boast must have also carried the feudal tinge. Many feudal ideas could naturally be traced in the 1857 thinking, but could the general aim — the expulsion of foreign rule and the overthrow of oppression — be fairly condemned as feudal reaction? The feudal chiefs mostly kept aloof from the revolt leaning rather to the paramount power. The English-educated renaissance gentry mostly looked askance at the revolt, for they were captivated by their vision of the liberating role of the British, ignoring the alien domination, but was this not one of the admitted limitations affecting the entire 're-awakening' process in the 19th century?

I shall not linger over the later aspects of our freedom movement because of the vastness of the subject. But one drawback cannot be passed over. The predominating Hindu tone, often unconscious, in the ranks of our nationalists had the most unfortunate consequences, since the majority community should have been more aware of the susceptibilities of the weaker groups. This was the surest way to alienate the non-Hindus, to foment unreasonable suspicions of a Hindu domination. Was this not a real handicap in a multi-community country? In this connection I have often been reminded of the plight of 19th century Hungary. There the dominant Magyar nationalists, in their fight against the foreign German rulers, raised the slogans of 'Hungary — One and Indivisible' and Magyar linguistic ascendancy, thus managing to forfeit the sympathy of the Slavic minority communities in a crucial period. The Hindu bias unhappily persists in even-independent India and still constitutes a danger to our secular democratic nationhood in which men will stand as equals without any religious trappings, in which we will feel that "a man's a man for a' that."

## VI

Broadly speaking, history flows on three levels as it were. In the primary first stream, the object is to ascertain the solid 'facts' which are like the bricks of a building to discover true 'events', to settle the disputed dates or 'sequence'. This is a necessary task, but quite attainable if the evidence has not been lost.

Secondly, however, no study can stop with mere isolated facts. There must be a 'selection' from among diverse facts, as in most cases we cannot use all the factual material available; we have to choose what seems to be the important facts. Thus our second current must involve 'evaluation, concentrating on certain points, searching the possible links between events, tracing the connection between supposed causes and probable effects. The process of selection and evaluation at once raises the necessity for 'generalisation' which some historians scoff at, of course, at their own peril, as Toynbee demonstrated in a rejoinder to Fisher. Selection, evaluation, generalisation necessarily imply a point of view which accounts for the differences between historians broadly handling the same material. A point of view negates at least the claim of some historians that historical conclusions are like judicial verdicts, final truths, full objective reality.

In the third channel of historical discussion, different points of view can be subjected to scrutiny, for all points of view cannot be equally valid, each has to be in its turn evaluated on its own merit. While no final truth is attainable in history, relative truth is surely a reality within our grasp as in all science. This search after truth, an "exhilarating never-ending search", is of course always an 'approximation'. Thus we may pass from one historical outlook to another through a rational exercise of the intellect. Primary facts must not be distorted, but one evaluation can certainly be higher, more comprehensive, more penetrating, more convincing than another. It is thus that we reach a philosophy of history, competing with other such philosophies.

The definitions of history spring really from such philosophical approaches, as when Ibn Khaldun said that the true historical reality lay in social transformation or the study of the changes in the social life of man, or when Kosambi described the historical process as "the presentation in chronological order of the successive changes in the means and relations of production."

Of late, of course, Marxism has gained much currency as a modern philosophy of history. I have already disclaimed any intention of ex-

pounding Marxism here. For one thing, I am not competent enough to do justice to the theme. For another, illness has at this juncture affected too deeply the energy needed for even attempting the task. I shall confine myself to a few comments meant primarily for the young Marxian researches with an apology and a plea for forgiveness. My point is that we must not make of Marxism a too facile simplistic formula, a dogma rather than a guide to action. Non-Marxians also may ponder over the intricacies of the theory instead of brushing it aside as too crude an approach.

Take the idea of class struggle for example. In any class-society, the interests of different classes naturally do not coincide, but rather run counter to each other. Class differences are real. But such differences do not and cannot always reach the same height of feeling or strength of expression, the same pitch of mutual conscious clash. That is to say, class struggles are acute or quiescent in accordance with objective circumstances, are indeed of different degrees of intensity according to a concrete process of evolution which has to be carefully studied. Uneven development is a rule here as well. The recognition of class war therefore is not enough; we must ascertain its actual character and sphere of influence at a given moment of history; general formulas cannot here replace objective knowledge. A general formulation, irrespective of the specific circumstances which have to be carefully studied, is not of much help in true historical analysis. And yet class struggle is not a figment but a persistent truth throughout the ages.

Or, the central thought in historical materialism on the shaping of the super-structure by the base. Here it is so easy to run into the distortion indicated by a mechanical view, turning the mental super-structure into a mere reflex of the economic base. Yet Marx himself recognised the relative autonomy of certain areas of the super-structure and its necessary time-lag in its adjustment to the mode of production. In the celebrated letters of Engels to his German disciples, we read how economic conditions do not produce an automatic cultural effect; how ideological spheres may sometimes react on the material mode of existence; how the super-structure in its turn may exercise an influence on historical struggle and development; how the thought of an epoch carries with it a certain heritage of the past and cannot start with a clean slate as it were; how the relatively more abstract ideologies exhibit a greater independence in the line of actual develop-

ments; how "men make their history themselves, only they do so in a given environment which conditions it."

Or, the Marxian concept of civil society. Civil society is the complex of private institutions and activities as distinct from the political society of official governmental-administrative organs. Civil society, when the term became fashionable in the 18th century before Marx, was often identified with the expanding bourgeois life of the period, still not identical with the political state structure of the age. But in the *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels extended the conception to cover the forms of intercourse "at all previous historical stages" fundamentally rooted in the mode of production of the epoch concerned. "This civil society is the true source and theatre of all history", Marx said, and not the "high sounding dramas of princes and states." Again, civil society "embraces the whole commercial and industrial life of a given stage" and it is the study of this civil society which is of course the foundation of the materialistic conception of history. Antonio Gramsci has clarified the concept still further and explained that while 'political society' is made up of public governmental institutions, organs of command and even coercion which is the adjunct of state power, 'civil society' is the totality of private institutions and activities exercising persuasion over the community. He added that a new ruling class has to acquire a 'hegemony' over civil society in order to succeed and maintain its authority, and not merely think in terms of a capture of power of the political arena. It is gratifying to note that young Indian scholars like Asok Sen have recently turned their attention to the domain of civil society with Marxian interest, for obviously Indian history has in our own civil society a much richer field for more fruitful exploration than in traditional political history of "princes and states." The dictum — only state has a history — is a singularly barren idea in the historical studies in our land.

I must now end my long rambling repetitive discourse and thank you for the patience and the forbearance with which you have listened to me. Your ordeal at last is over now and you will be free to turn to more instructive addresses and more profitable discussions.

## SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

### I On the 'Notes on the Bengal Renaissance'

The booklet, *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance*, originally published in 1946, has come under much criticism, naturally from academic circles. I myself would have materially recast it had I written it later with greater leisure. Yet, in the various reprints I have stuck to the original text for certain specific reasons.

This modest book after all made current the term 'Bengal Renaissance' (instead of the Renaissance in Bengal or the Bengali Renaissance etc.). This term has indeed passed into historical usage commonly accepted — ever since. Many of the sub-headings were introduced by my friend Mohan Kumaramangalam at the time of the original printing, and naturally I have not changed them, in his memory.

David Kopf handsomely acknowledged that here was the first attempt at a periodisation of the 19th century 'awakening' in Bengal.

The booklet was not meant for scholars or based on research, the material being gleaned from easily available secondary sources. It was intended for political workers on the left who needed a background survey of the cultural life of 19th century Bengal. It was not even an attempt at a Marxist analysis of events. A second intention was to provide a broad simple survey for students and general readers interested in the period. My modest claim is that these purposes have been served in however inadequate a fashion as it turned out to be.

One main criticism has been the analogy with the Italian Renaissance. But an analogy is only an analogy, not a replica. Renaissance, in a narrow sense implying some new cultural change, a sort of awakening, has often been used in European history itself. Thus we hear of the Twelfth Century renaissance, or even of a Carolingian renaissance — movements which are not confused with or compared to the Great Renaissance.

Again, the famous Italian Renaissance itself had its own limitations, known to the European historians. Instances are easily found in the

over-zealous glorification of the classical past and the contempt for mediaeval thought. The Italian Renaissance was also very largely concerned with the intellectual elite.

I was aware of the limitations in our own Renaissance, though in the *Notes* in 1946 I omitted them, perhaps in a hasty over-simplification. In the very next decade, before the modern criticism set in, I emphasised these in several essays which are in reprints usually tacked on to the original booklet. The major limitations to the Bengal Renaissance in my opinion were three: (1) The majority of the representations of our awakening identified progress with the British rule, ignoring the fact that the British held us in the strait-jacket of semi-colonial subjection and imperialist exploitation. (ii) The elite in our renaissance were gulf apart from the common masses of our people and lived in a world of their own. (iii) The Hindu bias usually prevalent in the awakened gentlemen of our movement could not but alienate the Muslim consciousness, which has unfortunate consequences, much to the gratification of our alien British rulers.

The *Notes* highlighted the achievements of the men in our Renaissance to serve as an inspiration to those for whom the booklet was primarily intended. It was natural in this context to overlook the complexities in the actual historical situation, the drawbacks in the lives depicted and their shortcomings.

## II On the 'Economic Thought of Rammohun Roy'

The text of this Essay, in the very opening passage, makes it abundantly clear that it deals with the varied information presented by Rammohun Roy for scrutiny by the British Parliament in view of the revision of the East India Company's Charter due in 1833. The Essay is therefore not an examination of the economic thought of Rammohun Roy in its entirety, and much of it had to be left out.

## III On 'David Hare'

Modern historians have pointed out the shortcomings of David Hare, questioning his morality in business matters and suggesting in him a patronising attitude towards the 'young hopefuls' who ran after him for educational benefits. This Essay on the other hand highlights the veneration that he undoubtedly inspired in the minds of his beneficiaries and his younger contemporaries which certainly was a fact in the history of the period that cannot be passed over.

#### IV On 'Derozio and Young Bengal'

In our younger days we were brought up in the idea that Derozio and the Derozians were a bunch of misguided errant people steeped in blind Anglophilism, indifferent to our own country and people, wild and intemperate in their personal lives. This Essay was a vindication of their movement, its specific rational idealism, their courage and personal integrity. Curiously, this vindication has now in certain circles seems to have led to an over-reaction in their favour attributing to them revolutionary modern qualities which would have seemed alien to their real nature. It is difficult indeed to preserve a historical balance as soon as one steps out of the concrete context, for indeed each observer has his scheme of the weal or woe'.

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